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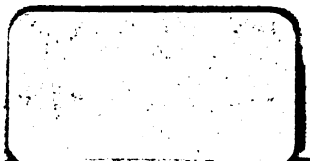

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Kummer

THE WEB

THE WEB

A NOVEL

BY

FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER

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1919

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TO
MY SMALL SON
FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER, Jr.
THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED

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THE WEB

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CHAPTER I

"MR. HOFFMAN," said the man across the table, "you are expected to carry out whatever instructions may be given you, to the letter. Are you ready to do so?"

Bob Hoffman hesitated for the fraction of a second, then nodded.

"I am ready," he replied. "What are the instructions?"

"You will communicate, at once, without the least delay, any military information of which you may become possessed, to the German secret service authorities." The speaker bent upon the man before him a pair of intensely brilliant grey eyes.

He was a short, thickset man, somewhat bald, with a closely cropped grey moustache that accentuated, rather than hid, the firm, determined lines of his mouth and chin. He spoke slowly, deliberately, as one possessing authority, regarding the young man opposite him with grave imperturbability.

The latter, tall, slender, yet of muscular build, met his companion's gaze without betraying the least emotion. He was a handsome man, clean-shaven, with an indefinable something about his lean square jaws that suggested the American.

"In what way am I to obtain the military information of which you speak?" he presently asked.

"I will tell you. You are, I believe, well acquainted with Vice Admiral Lord Brooke, of the Admiralty Naval Staff?"

"Lord Brooke!" This time the young man was shaken out of his composure. "Of course I am. He is my brother-in-law. He married my sister."

"Precisely. And you are a frequent visitor at his house!"

"I am."

"Very well. Lord Brooke is given to talking, at times. He will be indiscreet. He will occasionally let fall information of the greatest value. That information you will make use of, as I have indicated."

"But—my own brother-in-law!" Hoffman exclaimed, with troubled eyes.

"I should perhaps have informed you," remarked his companion, "that it is because of your relationship to Lord Brooke that you

have been selected for the work in hand."

The young man mastered his hesitation with an effort.

"How am I to convey the secrets of which you speak to the German authorities?" he asked.

His companion shrugged his shoulders.

"That information will be furnished you by those you will meet upon the Continent."

"Upon the Continent?" Hoffman asked, surprised.

"Yes. You will proceed to Rotterdam in the morning, and call upon the German consul there. Explain to him just what you propose to do. He will instruct you as to your future movements."

"I see." The young American tossed his half-smoked cigarette into the fireplace, and rose. He seemed uneasy, uncertain of his ground.

"To take advantage of Lord Brooke's friendship, of his relationship to me," he remarked, coldly, "will be rather a shabby trick."

"Please remember," replied his companion quickly, " that you have sworn to carry out your orders, without questioning them. Vast interests are at stake. Everything depends upon your obedience, your devotion. I realize that the part you are called upon to play is distasteful to you. It would be distasteful to any

man of honor. But the interests involved are too great, too important, to admit of any hesitation. You must remember your oath, and obey blindly. Do you understand?" In the gravity with which the older man invested his words there was a note almost of menace.

"Further," he continued, "I feel that I should point out to you that the smallest error on your part is almost certain to cost you your life. Treachery *we* will never forgive—mistakes will be no less promptly punished by our enemies. Do I make myself clear?"

Hoffman nodded gravely, with a sudden realization of the dangers of the course upon which his blind love of adventure had embarked him. The information just imparted to him had been so startling, so unexpected, that his brain whirled.

"Before you go," his companion remarked, "you will give me your thumb-prints." He took a small inked pad and some paper from one of the drawers of the table and pushed them toward Hoffman. "It is a necessary precaution, and may prove valuable to you, in case you have occasion to communicate with us at this end. Sign any such communications with the impression of your right thumb, but write nothing unless absolutely necessary. In work of this sort, verbal messages are the only safe ones." He

folded the sheet upon which Hoffman had left the print of his thumbs, and placed it in his pocket. "Do not forget that, in England, you will be known, not by name, but by the number 424. Fix this number carefully in your mind. In the mission upon which you are embarking, there can be no mistakes, no failures. Your wits must be keen, your nerves of steel. For the rest, obey your instructions implicitly, and without question. I think that is all." He rose, and went toward the door. "Permit me to wish you good-day."

Hoffman left the room, his brain in a tumult. During the six weeks he had spent in London, he had grumbled unceasingly, because nothing had happened. Now, at the beginning of the seventh he felt that he had small reason to complain on that score.

Six weeks before, he had arrived in England, with a firm determination to proceed at once to the front, and from there write a series of articles about the war for one of the magazines, which articles, by reason of their brilliancy, their truth, would make him famous. And instead of going to the front, he had been obliged to sit idly about London, fuming and fussing, because his requests to the war office for permission to visit the trenches had been met with polite but none the less definite refusals.

He had supposed that, coming to London as the brother-in-law of Lord Brooke, he would at once be permitted to proceed to the firing-line, but he found himself as far removed from the goal of his literary ambitions, now that he was in the English capital, as he had been in New York. The guns, the men, the fighting, along the Yser, the Aisne, seemed, if anything, even more remote, now that he was a scant hundred miles away from them, than they had seemed when separated from him by the full width of the Atlantic. England, it appeared, had no use for the free-lance correspondent. Lord Kitchener wanted no literary deadwood in the trenches, no leaks, however innocent they might appear, through which news of Britain's vast preparations might reach the enemy. As a result, Hoffman had been reduced to such uninspiring pursuits as reading the bulletin boards, and drinking tea with the Brookes, two occupations very far removed from the great purpose which had brought him across the ocean. He longed to go to France, to Germany, to see actual fighting, to witness at first hand the terrific cataclysm that was rocking the foundations of the world. For six weeks nothing whatever had occurred, and then had begun the remarkable series of incidents which had culminated in the interview through which he had just passed.

That very morning, he had been approached, in the lobby of his hotel, by a blond young man, whom he had met occasionally about the corridors, and to whom he had from time to time complained, concerning his inability to overcome the objections of the war office to correspondents at the front. The man, who claimed to be an American, exhaled a decidedly foreign atmosphere, in spite of his Anglo-Saxon name of Sedgwick. He came up, proposed a drink, and a little later suggested that Hoffman and he have luncheon together.

The latter, in a state of desperation, had consented. He was always ready to air his grievances, and had found Sedgwick a ready listener.

During the course of the meal, Sedgwick had exhibited a most amazing knowledge of his companion's personal affairs, of his hopes, his feelings regarding the war, the state of his finances, his friends both in England and in America, almost of his very thoughts. Then, when Hoffman's astonishment was at its height, he had suddenly announced that if the latter really wanted to go to the war zone, the matter might possibly be arranged.

"There is one way in which it might be accomplished," he had said, at length. "It is an oportunity that would not occur again in a lifetime."

"I 'll take it," Hoffman laughed, without regarding the matter very seriously. "Anything to get out of my present situation and see some actual fighting. I 've almost decided to enlist—on either side, if it would result in my running this war to earth."

"The opportunity of which I speak," Sedgwick replied gravely, "is far from being a joke. On the contrary, it is likely to involve the greatest danger. Death would never be very far from your elbow."

"What of that? It is a chance any man must take. Plenty of Americans have already been killed, even in the Red Cross work. I 'd take my chances quick enough. What would I have to do?"

"I cannot tell you exactly. Someone else will have to do that. But this much I will say. Certain interests in this country find it necessary to send information, of a peculiar sort, to persons in Germany. These interests have investigated your affairs thoroughly, and they realize that there are reasons why you are peculiarly fitted for the work in hand. You are a neutral, a writer. You could pass back and forth, without exciting suspicion. You have courage, intelligence, a certain standing, passports, credentials of various sorts—in fact, you occupy an ideal position for undertaking the

work. We believe you to be a man who would carry out his orders blindly, implicitly, without regard for the consequences; realizing that those consequences are in the hands of others, playing a game you could not understand. I regret that I cannot speak more frankly. Signify your willingness to accept my offer, and the matter will be explained to you in greater detail."

"Do you wish me to obtain information, to act, in other words, as a spy?" Hoffman asked, flushing.

The man shook his head.

"Not that, exactly. Rather to give information, than to obtain it. But I cannot go further into the matter, without violating my instructions. All I can say is, that an opportunity is offered you to render certain interests a great service. You can take advantage of this opportunity or not, as you please. We do not urge it upon you. But I must have your answer at once."

"If what I am to do involves nothing dishonorable," Hoffman replied, fearful lest this chance to reach the front might be snatched from him, "I will go."

"Very well. Suppose we see my superior at once. If you find anything in the undertaking that violates your sense of what is honorable, I

advise you not to attempt it. You alone must be the judge."

An hour later, Hoffman was closeted with the grey-eyed man whose instructions he was now about to follow. The task this gentleman had outlined to him had been so bold, so amazing in its ramifications, that he listened to it in astonished silence. Only after he had given his consent, and sworn himself to absolute secrecy, did he realize the nature of the service in which he was now enrolled. The prospect of what was to come alternately pleased and terrified him. He returned to his hotel, not quite sure, as yet, whether he was in reality fully awake.

On his arrival, a letter was handed to him. He recognized Lady Brooke's crest, upon the seal. His sister suggested, quite informally, that he drop in that afternoon for tea.

CHAPTER II

"BAD news!" exclaimed Alan Brooke, as he went up to his wife. "Good God! I should say so!"

"What is it, Alan?" asked Lady Brooke, a quick pallor replacing the color in her cheeks. "Not—Herbert?"

Her husband nodded, and flung himself into a chair. "Yes—Herbert."

Lady Brooke glanced across the table, and met the eyes of the young man who was seated opposite her, pretending to be interested in a book. He was a tall man, with clear grey eyes, and a smile, whimsical, yet determined, very like her own.

"Can Bob know?" she asked, turning to her husband.

Alan Brooke looked up quickly. The young man put down his book and rose.

"If you two want to be alone"—he began.

"Nonsense. Sit down, Bob. No reason why you should n't hear what I have to say to Nelly. It will all be in the papers, by morning, anyway. Cradock's squadron, in the Pacific, you know, has been defeated by the Germans. My

younger brother, Herbert, was Lieutenant on the flagship, *Good Hope*. She was sunk, with all on board. I 've just come from the Admiralty."

Lady Brooke gave a sudden cry.

"Alan!" she gasped. "How awful."

The young man beside the table extended his hand to Lord Brooke, but he did not say anything at all. His handclasp, the look upon his face, fully expressed his feelings.

"God—what a day for England!" Lord Brooke exclaimed, rising, and beginning to stride up and down the room.

"I can't believe it," the young man said, at length. "I understood reinforcements had been sent—the battleship *Canopus*."

Lord Brooke turned with a look of interrogation.

"How did you know the *Canopus* had gone out?" he asked quickly.

"Why—you told him so yourself," interposed Lady Brooke. "I remember it distinctly. You need have no fears about Bob. He does n't talk."

"I have n't any fears about him, Nelly," observed Lord Brooke. "Not in the sense you mean, at least. But Bob is a writer, and it 's his business to tell the public anything he knows, or can find out, about the movements of our

fleet. I need scarcely say, old chap," he continued, turning to the other, "that anything you may happen to learn, here"—he glanced about the splendidly furnished drawing-room—"is not to be given to the public."

Hoffman flushed, and straightened his shoulders.

"I quite understand," he replied, his mind going back to the instructions given him but a few hours before. Well, at least he had no intention of publishing anything he might learn.

Lord Brooke observed the young man's embarrassment, and hastened to relieve it. Going up to him, he threw his arm about his shoulders.

"Sorry, Bob," he exclaimed, with a smile. "This damned business has completely upset me. Think of Cradock, gone! And Herbert." He looked helplessly at his wife. "Who 's going to tell Patricia?"

Lady Brooke went up to him, her eyes heavy with tears.

"Let us go to her together," she said. "Patricia will be brave. Herbert died for his country. That is as you, as all of us, would have wished. And as *he* would have wished, too. You 'd better wait, Bob. Patricia will want to see you." A moment later she and her husband had left the room.

Hoffman tossed his cigar into the fire and

began to stride up and down the hearth-rug. Patricia—he had almost forgotten her in the startling events of the day. And yet, Patricia Brooke had been almost as constantly in his thoughts, during the past few weeks, as his desire to go to the Continent, and that was saying a great deal.

Patricia was twenty-two, and considered a great beauty. Hoffman thought her so. In fact, he was half convinced that he was in love with her. He would have been fully convinced, had he dared, but so far no word or action on the girl's part had given courage to his convictions. She seemed far too deeply occupied, bringing in slackers, bolstering up the courage of the timid, living and breathing a vivid patriotism, to have time for such matters as love. At least so Hoffman thought. And now, her brother Herbert, whom he had never seen, but whom he well knew Patricia adored, had been taken from her. The agony that this loss would bring to the girl's heart lay close to his own.

Now, however, all was changed. He had embarked on strange waters. He hesitated to imagine what Patricia would think of him, could she have heard the instructions given him that morning—instructions that at any moment he might be called upon to carry out. The whole thing became horribly distasteful to him, and

yet there were reasons why he must not draw back. He waited impatiently for his sister to return.

After what seemed to him an interminable time, someone came through the doorway behind him. Hoffman turned, thinking it to be Lady Brooke. It was Patricia.

The girl stood for a moment, silhouetted against the gold and green brocaded curtains that hung in the doorway. Her eyes, glowing with a fine fire, were quite free from the tears that Hoffman had expected to see in them. Even the pallor of her face was relieved by the glow from the log fire, the amber tints from the silk-shaded lamp. Her hair, somewhat disarranged, her defiant carriage, her detached expression, reminded him vaguely of a picture he had once seen of Joan of Arc. He bowed, unable to do more than utter her name—her first name, since his sister had, immediately on his arrival in London, made him one of the family.

She came toward him with a firm and confident step.

"How do you do, Bob?" she said, very quietly. "Nelly tells me you know about Herbert and—and the fleet." The disaster to the nation seemed to affect her even more than her personal loss.

"It—it is terrible," Hoffman murmured. "I

did not know your brother, but I do know what he meant to you."

The girl sank into a chair.

"Herbert died as he would have wanted to die," she said, quietly. "It is a bad day for England. Someone has blundered."

"Admiral Cradock," Hoffman ventured.

"No. Not Cradock. He lived up to the traditions of the service. The fault is at the Admiralty. His ships were outclassed. His reinforcements were sent too late. That 's the trouble with us. We do everything too late. This war can't be muddled through. Our people ought to know that, by this time. Now we must have revenge. Admiral von Spee's squadron must be hunted out—destroyed."

"Like looking for a needle in a haystack," Hoffman observed.

"It will be found—and sunk," the girl replied. "Let us speak of something else. Have you received any encouragement from the War Office?"

"Not the least. They refuse to let me go to France—as a correspondent, at any rate. I might try the Red Cross, or enlist." He spoke rather lightly, and the girl observed it.

"I should think even that would be better than sitting about doing nothing." Her eyes sparkled. "A good many of your fellow-

countrymen are driving ambulances in France. Some are in the Foreign Legion. I should think that either might give you the opportunity for seeing things first hand that you want."

The implied reproach in her words sent the blood to Hoffman's cheeks. He straightened his shoulders and his eyes met the girl's defiantly.

"I had hoped to write a series of articles for one of our magazines at home," he said. "I could not do that, I am afraid, if I were to enlist, or even to drive an ambulance, although you may be quite sure that I should prefer either to sitting about London doing nothing."

Patricia rose and went up to him.

"I did not mean to reproach you, Bob," she said, gently. "Forgive me, if what I have said has hurt you. I am so accustomed to speaking to our own young men in that way, that I quite forgot, for the moment, that you are a neutral."

Hoffman flushed at her words. He felt that he was very far from being a neutral. He was leaving London in the morning, but he could not tell her so. Absolute secrecy as to his movements, his plans, had been most rigidly demanded of him. He regarded his companion with a look of helpless annoyance.

"I know it." She put out her hand, and Hoffman took it eagerly.

"If *you* thought for a moment, Pat, that I was a coward," he exclaimed, "it would break my heart." It was more perhaps than he intended to say, less than he would have liked to say. The momentary pause which followed his words was embarrassing. Then Patricia spoke.

"I know you are not a coward, Bob," she whispered. "Don't be angry with me. This has been such a terrible day." Her lips trembled, she sank into a chair and nervously lit a cigarette. Hoffman saw that the strain had begun to tell on her.

"Never mind about my affairs," he said. "They are not very important. It 's *you,* I 'm worried about, now. Alan and my sister had asked me to dinner, but, in the circumstances, I think I had better not stay. Is there anything that I can do for you?"

"Nothing." She shook her head. "But I see no reason why you should not stay for dinner, as you had intended. You know how I loved my brother. Nelly has told you. But this is not a time for personal griefs. We are fighting, all of us, for an ideal. If we have to give one man in every ten, if every family in England wears mourning, we must still go on until we have won our fight."

Hoffman, undecided whether to go or stay, watched her eager face. A moment later the

curtains before the doorway were thrust aside, and Lord and Lady Brooke came into the room. Patricia spoke at once of Bob's wish to leave.

"I have told him not to think of it," she concluded.

"Quite right," said Lord Brooke, quickly. "I insist upon your remaining, Bob. We can have a talk, after dinner. Will you?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," Hoffman replied, glancing at Patricia.

It seemed to him that she thanked him with her eyes.

CHAPTER III

WHEN dinner was over, the two men retired to coffee and cigars in the library. Lord Brooke seemed able to talk of nothing but the disaster to the fleet.

"Think of it," he said. "Cradock and all the others, drowned like dogs. I can't believe it."

"I confess," said Hoffman, "that I cannot either. I understood, from what I have seen in the papers, that the flagship carried nine-inch guns. That should have given her the range of the Germans. Von Spee's vessels carried nothing above an eight."

"It is true," Lord Brooke replied, "that the *Good Hope* had nine-inch guns in her main battery, but there was nothing aboard any of the other ships of our squadron of larger calibre than six-inch. The two German cruisers, the *Scharnhorst* and the *Gneisenau,* are able ships, and very fast. Our squadron must have been out-manœuvered, and battered to pieces by the enemy's eight-inch guns, without being able to bring their shorter range batteries into action. England has got to face the bitter truth. Our Pacific squadron has been defeated."

Hoffman nodded. The instructions of the morning crowded into his brain. Lord Brooke, the man with the keen grey eyes had said, was at times apt to be indiscreet, to talk. He seemed on the point of doing so, now.

"I suppose you will send out a new squadron, and hunt down the enemy's vessels," Hoffman remarked, carelessly.

"Yes," his companion assented. "That must be our object, of course. But it is easier said than done. We have plenty of vessels available, older battle cruisers, of the *Inflexible*, the *Invincible* type, with both the guns and the speed to make short work of von Spee's squadron, but the problem is to find him. The chase may lead around the world. We know that the German admiral is off the coast of Chile, at present, but where will he be next week, the week after? Even without facilties for docking, for replenishing fuel, the enemy's ships are very fast. A stern chase, you know, is a long one. And after all, we have no knowledge as to which way they will go. They may turn north, and strike the San Francisco-Yokohama route. Or they may turn south, round the Horn, and be half-way to the African coast, before our squadron could reach the south Atlantic. What orders shall we give our commander—to find von Spee? I confess that, were I to put to sea

with such instructions I should be at a loss to know what to do." The Englishman gazed into the fire, his ruddy face wrinkled in thought. Hoffman said nothing. The truth of what his companion had told him was self-evident.

"The worst thing of all," Lord Brooke went on, "would be to have the Germans separate. They would be wise to do so, for in that way they would be able to play havoc with our commerce at any number of widely separated points, and it would take months to hunt down each ship separately. The Naval Staff has been considering the problem all the afternoon, from every possible angle. I am tired out." He lay back in his chair, and puffed nervously at his cigar.

Again Hoffman hesitated to speak, although the opportunity was such a golden one. Lord Brooke, it appeared, wanted to talk, to confide his difficulties, his problems, to someone's ears. Hoffman emptied his demi-tasse.

"Did you arrive at any conclusion?" he asked, hating himself for the words.

"Yes. In a way. It has been decided to send out a fast battle-cruiser squadron under Vice Admiral Sir Frederick Sturdee. His flagship will be the *Inflexible*. He will set sail a week from tomorrow, to find von Spee."

Hoffman listened to the words in amazement. The importance of the information so carelessly

confided to him was evident. The nature of the pursuing fleet, the name of the flagship, of the officer in command, the date of departure, were all in his hands. Priceless information indeed, to be flashed from Berlin, by devious stretches of cable and wireless, to the German squadron off the Chilean coast. Perhaps the result of this knowledge, on von Spee's part, would be an order for his vessels to scatter, the very action most feared by the British naval authorities. Hoffman fixed the words Lord Brooke had uttered clearly in his memory. When he reached the continent, he would have something of value to report.

A moment later, Lady Brooke and Patricia came in. Both seemed to have put the loss of Herbert Brooke out of their minds. Patricia was full of a tragedy that she had observed, earlier in the day, in one of the poorer sections of the city, not far from Whitechapel. She had been doing missionary work to aid the volunteer enlistments, addressing small gatherings of idle men, urging upon the slackers the dangers which threatened the empire.

A young man, who might have been a waiter, had paused for a moment, on the outskirts of the crowd. Under one arm he carried a cylindrical package, wrapped in newspaper. A chance word to one of the bystanders had re-

vealed, by means of a slight accent, his Teutonic origin. Someone pointed to the package under his arm, and suggested that it might be a bomb. The man, frightened by the demonstration, started to run, dropping the package as he did so. One of the crowd picked it up, stripped off the wrappings and disclosed what appeared to be a metal cylinder, with a screw cap at one end. The bystanders, convinced that it was a bomb, rushed after the fellow with loud cries, caught him, and before the police could intervene he had been badly beaten. In fact, but for the arrival of the police, he would certainly have been killed. The metal cylinder, Patricia said in conclusion, turned out to be nothing but a somewhat battered vacuum bottle, containing hot coffee. She mentioned the matter to show how bitter the feeling was against spies and the like.

"If the crowd had had three minutes more, the man would have been torn to pieces," she said. "Yet, in spite of the terrible danger, it is well known that London is filled with German secret agents. Even the movements of the fleet, the crossing of transports, the location of training camps, aircraft defenses, munition works, are known, and reported in some mysterious way to the enemy. It is certain that there are several German wireless stations along the

southeast coast, and news of the most intimate character, involving even the decisions of the Army and Navy staffs, is constantly being transmitted by means of them. No one knows how this news gets out, and yet it does. It 's scarcely safe to trust anyone, nowadays."

Hoffman felt the blood rising to his cheeks. How simple, after all, were the means of which the girl spoke. He glanced at Lord Brooke, wondering if Patricia's words would cause him to remember that he himself had, not ten minutes before, been guilty of the very sort of indiscretion of which his sister now complained. The nobleman, however, seemed singularly placid and unmoved. He puffed with contentment at his cigar. One might have supposed that his confidence of a few minutes before had passed completely from his mind.

And yet, Hoffman argued, his complacency arose, no doubt, from a firm belief that he had no cause to doubt the honesty and good faith of the members of his own family. It was a silent compliment that made the young man squirm. Only an amazing bit of knowledge, that he alone, of all those in the room possessed, served to bolster up his courage. He would go through with what he had undertaken, even if it cost him not only Patricia's friendship and respect, but his life. There were conditions, in

the oath he had taken, that gave to his determination the strength of steel. Scarcely even to himself could he admit what those conditions were.

Patricia spoke again, her face flushed, her eyes shining.

"I would rather be cut to pieces with knives or thrown into boiling oil, than be a spy," she burst forth. "Nothing in the world could be more despicable."

"And yet," Lord Brooke remarked, after a moment's silence, "there are English spies, as well, my dear, and they risk their lives, just as those of the enemy do, a thousand times a day, in the service of their country."

This aspect of the case seemed not to have occurred to the girl. She turned to Lord Brooke with a look of chagrin.

"I 'm wrong, I suppose," she exclaimed. "Everything is fair, they say, in love and war. But I would rather serve my country in some other way."

"And yet," her brother went on, with a quiet smile, "I am sure, Patricia, that if you were to learn, tonight, that the German fleet had left Wilhelmshaven, to attack our transport service to France, you would not hesitate an instant, to deliver that information to the war office. In fact, I fancy, you would take a positive pleasure

in doing so." He smiled, and patted his sister's hand. "Instead of condemning spies, I only wish we had a few more, as efficient, as unscrupulous, as daring, as those of the enemy. But let us talk of something else. These war discussions are becoming tiresome."

Hoffman, when the conversation turned to his unfulfilled desires to go to the front, found himself unable to join in the discussion. He was leaving in the morning, yet found his lips sealed. What would Patricia, what would they all think, when they learned of his departure? He determined to write to the girl, from Rotterdam, and give her some plausible explanation of his sudden disappearance. Forbidden, by his instructions, to speak in advance of his movements, there existed no reason, he argued, why he should not refer to them, in retrospect. A little later he took his leave, pleading as his excuse some letters that must be dispatched by the morning's post.

CHAPTER IV

BOB HOFFMAN found no difficulty in effecting his passage to Rotterdam. His passports, his credentials, his luggage were examined with the usual care, but the journey, via Harwich and the Hook of Holland, was made pleasantly, and without interruption or incident of any sort. The boat was not very well filled; the passengers for the most part apparently Dutch merchants, Americans of various sorts, and a number of indescribable persons about whom Hoffman speculated vaguely, wondering just what their mission on the Continent might be. Spies, like himself perhaps, he thought, then dismissed the idea from his mind. He was travelling as a magazine writer, a war correspondent, and refused to think of himself in any other light. Certainly, he argued, he was not a spy, since he came to give information, not to obtain it.

In Rotterdam he proceeded at once to the Victoria Hotel, and having secured a room, and disposed of his luggage, set out for his interview with the German consul.

His thoughts were of Patricia, more than they

were of the work before him. The girl had been so constantly in his life, during the past few weeks. He had seen her almost daily. Now that he could see her no longer, he realized, with a sinking heart, how much she meant to him, how barren the world would seem to him, without her.

It was in this frame of mind that he reached the entrance to the building that had been pointed out to him as the one he sought. He was by no means sure that he would find the consul in his office; the hour was late, the street lamps already glowed softly through the gathering darkness. He ascended the steps, and entered the door which led to the offices of the consulate.

A room of fair size was before him, about which, in chairs, sat a number of men and women, all apparently waiting to see the official he sought. Behind a high counter, on a stool, sat a young man, with bristling blond hair, and a pink and white complexion.

Hoffman advanced, and addressed him in German.

"I want to see the consul," he said.

The young man mechanically pushed a pad and pencil toward him.

"Your name and business, please," he replied.

Hoffman wrote his name upon the pad. His business he could not describe, so he wrote the word "Personal." The blond young man tore the slip from the pad, and retired to an inner room, motioning to Hoffman to take a seat. Presently he came back again, but said nothing. Hoffman resigned himself to a long wait.

One by one the occupants of the outer room passed the barrier of the high desk, to return no more. After almost an hour, Hoffman's turn arrived. He followed the clerk into an inner office, plainly furnished, in which sat an elderly man, heavily bearded, ruddy, stout.

The latter glanced up, on Hoffman's entrance and spoke in English.

"Mr. Hoffman?" he interrogated. "What can I do for you?" His manner was neither cordial nor abrupt. He spoke almost mechanically, as though repeating a formula.

Hoffman took a chair without being asked, and fixed his gaze upon the face of the man before him.

"I am an American, a magazine writer," he said.

The consul nodded wearily.

"Yes?" he said, with a rising inflexion.

"I have come to make you a proposition."

If the consul's interest was aroused, he did not betray the fact. He merely nodded.

"My sympathies," Hoffman went on, hurriedly, "are all with the Central Powers. I am of German descent. I think I am in a position to give you—your government—some valuable information."

"So?" The German's eyes betrayed a trifle more interest. "What sort of information?"

"My sister, in London, is married to Lord Brooke, who is connected with the Admiralty. From time to time I learn, through him, valuable secrets connected with the movements of the British fleet. These secrets I am ready to furnish to your government."

"Why?" The word came, dry and quick, like the snapping of a whip. Hoffman realized that his sincerity was in question.

"Because I need the money," he flashed back. "If I furnish information of value, I expect to be paid for it."

"Ah!" The consul breathed the word significantly. "What is the information you wish to sell?"

The trap was too palpable. Hoffman refused to be caught in it.

"When I have arranged, with the proper officials, for my price, I will disclose the information I have. Not otherwise."

The consul gave him a quick glance, then drew a sheet of paper toward him, and wrote a few

lines upon it. Then he folded the sheet, placed it in an envelope, and sealed it. Upon the envelope he wrote an address.

"Take this to the Military Governor of the city of Antwerp," he said. "Here." He drew a printed form from a drawer and began to fill it out. "You cannot go without a passport. Give me your full name, please."

As a result of this interview, the following morning found Hoffman *en route* to the great Belgian city, the capture of which by the Germans had created such a profound impression in England but a short time before.

He had no difficulty in locating the office of the Governor in the Hotel de Ville. The anterooms were filled with waiting persons, but the letter of introduction furnished by the consul in Rotterdam proved an open sesame. In less than half an hour, Hoffman was ushered into the Governor's presence.

He was a short, thickset man, his iron-grey hair closely cropped, his heavy moustaches stained with tobacco, from the large black cigar, unlit, which he chewed in the corner of his mouth. He was in full military uniform, and sat behind a desk so piled with papers and printed documents that they seemed to form a veritable barricade. The conversation was in German.

"What do you want?" the Governor asked, brusquely, as Hoffman appeared before him.

The young man repeated the information he had given to the consul in Rotterdam. This time, however, his questioner set it all down very carefully on a sheet of paper, inquiring particularly as to Hoffman's age, place of birth, the name of his father, his residence in New York, whether he was married or single, and a variety of other things that, so far as Hoffman could see, were quite unimportant. When these preliminaries had been completed, the official turned to Hoffman with a glare of suspicion.

"How do I know you are not an English spy?" he rasped.

"You will know it," Hoffman remarked, steadily, "when you hear the information I am prepared to give."

"What information? I advise you to speak frankly."

"Since my object in bringing this information to you is to obtain a good price for it, I naturally cannot divulge what I know, without first having some understanding as to what I am to receive in return." He spoke the words coldly, deliberately, his face impassive. A look of scorn crossed the Governor's iron visage.

"So. You wish to make a bargain, eh? And how do you expect me to say what your in-

formation is worth, until I know what it is?"

Hoffman was for the moment non-plussed. The Governor's words certainly contained much logic.

"It is not so much the particular piece of information I am able to give you now, your excellency," he observed, "but that which I may convey to you in the future, that I have in mind. My position, as the brother-in-law of Lord Brooke, will enable me, from time to time, to furnish your government with naval secrets of great value. In undertaking this work, I must necessarily incur certain risks, for which I expect to be adequately paid."

"Precisely. You would, in other words, become a member of our secret service, and be paid a regular salary. That is all very well, young man, but first you must demonstrate to us both your devotion to our cause, and your ability to furnish us with information of value. Until you are ready to convince us on these two points, I have nothing further to say." He began to examine some reports upon his desk, and Hoffman realized that the time had come to speak.

"If I put you in possession of an important military secret now, your excellency, will you be convinced?" he asked.

"Perhaps," said the Governor. "Provided,

of course, that your information proves to be correct. What have you to tell me?"

"This." Hoffman glanced nervously about the small room, and lowered his voice. "A British squadron, composed in part of battle cruisers, and commanded by Admiral Sturdee, will set sail on the 22nd, to destroy the squadron under Admiral von Spee. His flagship will be the *Inflexible.*"

The Governor's eyes gleamed with interest. He half turned in his chair.

"You are certain of this?" he asked quickly.

"Positive."

"The other vessels?"

"Battle cruisers of the same type. I do not know their names."

"Ah!" His excellency made some rapid notes. "What you tell me is important—highly important, if it is true. If it is not, so much the worse for you." He struck sharply upon a bell that stood on the desk before him. Almost immediately a secretary appeared. Through the open door Hoffman glimpsed the helmet of a guard.

"Becker," said the Governor, in a crisp voice, "send Lieutenant von Wagner here at once."

The secretary saluted, and withdrew. Hoffman began to feel somewhat uneasy. Suppose, by any chance, the squadron did *not* sail on the

22nd. The Governor's words, "so much the worse for you," worried him. He waited in silence for his companion's next move.

A moment later a middle-aged officer, in the uniform of the *Landsturm,* entered the room with a military salute. The Governor turned to him, indicating Hoffman with a gesture.

"This person is Robert Hoffman, who claims to be an American war correspondent. You will place him in confinement, under guard, until further notice."

The lieutenant again saluted, and came toward Hoffman, who had by now risen. The young man turned to the Governor.

"Your excellency," he protested. "Why should I be placed under arrest? I am trying to serve your interests—"

"Possibly. Possibly not," the Governor broke in. "That remains to be seen. On the 22nd I shall know better than I do now, why you have come to me. Should your information prove to be correct, we will pursue further the matter of which we have spoken today. Should it prove false, I shall assume that your purpose was to mislead us, in order to inflict disaster in some way upon our forces. In the latter event, it will be my painful duty to order you to be shot." He turned to his papers with an air of dismissal.

The officer motioned sternly toward the door, and Hoffman went out into the corridor. His heart beat rather more rapidly than usual. The 22nd was just six days off.

CHAPTER V

THE six days that Bob Hoffman spent in prison in Antwerp were, to a man of his temperament, almost unbearable.

He was well enough treated. The room in which he was confined was fairly commodious, and reasonably well furnished, with no suggestion of the dungeon cell about it. There was an unbarred window from which he might have attempted to escape, but for the fact that it was, in the first place, forty feet from the ground, that in the second, it opened on a courtyard in which paced an armed guard, and in the third, that he had no reason whatever for attempting to escape in any event.

Meals, not elaborate, but well cooked, were brought in by an orderly, who glared at him without speaking. No newspapers were allowed him. His belongings, of every sort, down to his fountain pen, his finger ring, his scarf pin, even, had been taken from him. He could not have communicated with anyone outside, had he so desired, which, as matters stood, he did not. A few books in German, product of that period

in Teutonic literature in which materialism had not crowded out the idealism of the race, provided the only means by which he might while away the tedious hours. For the better part of six nights and days he alternately read "The Sorrows of Werther," and thought of Patricia. As the days passed, he grew tired of Werther's sorrows, and spent more time over his own. It was quite clear, now, that the work he had undertaken was certain to damn him forever, in Patricia's eyes. And so far as seeing anything of the war was concerned, he might just as well be in London as locked in a room in Antwerp, in spite of all the things of interest he knew were to be found so short a distance away.

He had not written to Patricia from Rotterdam. Something told him it would be better not to do so. He would doubtless be able to explain matters satisfactorily, on his return. A sudden opportunity to visit the war zone, of course. Certainly, before his return, he would be able to see something, if only the shell-torn defenses of Antwerp. All this, of course, provided he did return. It was a singular thought, that unless the British fleet set sail as he had reported it would, he would never return at all.

He began to experience a feeling of uneasiness. Why had not his instructions permitted him to make himself known, in some way other

than by name, to the German authorities? Of course, they would naturally be suspicious of him. That was to be expected in any event. The information he had brought must serve as his credentials. He could not believe that it would fail to turn out as he had said.

And if the British fleet did sail, what then? Would it be attacked, perhaps destroyed? Would a thousand, five thousand lives, be sacrificed, that his own might be saved? He began to share Patricia's feelings concerning the work of a spy.

In these moments, a recollection of his oath consoled him. He would be true to that, in any event, no matter what happened. At least Patricia should never be able to reproach him with cowardice.

On the morning of the sixth day—the day set for the departure of the British squadron, Hoffman finished an early breakfast, and sat down to await, with the utmost impatience, some message from the Governor. He thought that it might arrive by noon, in case the squadron sailed in the early morning, but noon came, and his mid-day meal, with no summons for him to leave his prison.

As the afternoon waned, and the early darkness settled over the city, Hoffman's uneasiness increased. When his supper arrived, and still

no word from the Governor accompanied it, he attempted to question the man who brought it, but the latter shook his head in silence, switched on the electric light that hung over the little table, and departed.

Hour after hour passed in grim silence. Hoffman began to feel distinctly alarmed. He consoled himself, however, with the thought that the English warships had probably left port under cover of darkness, in order to be secure against attack, and that news of their departure would of necessity require several hours to reach the German officials. He had just reached this conclusion, when he heard a distant bell chime the hour of midnight. At almost the same moment, there came the sound of footsteps from the hall, and the door was flung open.

In the entrance stood the *Landsturm* officer, Lieutenant von Wagner, flanked by two soldiers with rifles. The *Landsturmer* gazed impassively at him.

"You will please follow me at once!" he commanded, in crisp tones.

Hoffman rose, put on his hat and overcoat, and went out into the hall. The Lieutenant walked at his side. The two soldiers brought up the rear. The little procession moved onward in silence, and presently emerged into the dark courtyard. Hoffman glanced quickly

about, wondering if his last hour had come.

Instead of the file of soldiers that his imagination had pictured, an automobile drew up before the door. The officer motioned to him to enter, and at once took a place beside him. One of the soldiers seated himself alongside the chauffeur. The other saluted as the vehicle drove off, and re-entered the building.

The whole affair seemed very mysterious, but Hoffman determined to ask no further questions. Possibly he was being taken to the Governor's office, in the Hotel de Ville, although it seemed improbable that the latter would prolong his office duties until after midnight. On the other hand, he might be going to his execution, but even that, without some formality in the way of a trial, seemed unlikely. There was nothing to do but await in silence the outcome of events.

After a short drive, the car drew up before the door of a small house, in a rather dark street, and the lieutenant motioned to Hoffman to get out. He did so, and found himself beside the soldier who had occupied the place on the box.

The officer followed a moment later, and going to the door of the house, threw it open.

"Go inside!" he commanded, in guttural tones.

Hoffman did as he was told, and found himself in a small, square, dimly-lighted hall. A young man in civilian's clothes stood before him. The officer had retired.

"This way, please," the young man said, and conducting Hoffman to a door on the opposite side of the hall, knocked upon it.

"Come in," answered a loud voice in German.

The young man opened the door, and nodded to his companion, indicating that he should enter. A moment later the door behind him closed with a click.

Hoffman looked curiously about. The room, in Flemish style, was apparently a library, for its walls were lined with books, and at its far side blazed a wood fire, in a great stone chimney-place.

Between him and the fire was a desk, behind which sat a small man, in citizen's clothes, whose black hair and sombre eyes gave him an expression sinister and forbidding in the extreme.

He held an open letter in his hand, and was reading it as Hoffman came in. For a moment he looked up, then nodding toward a chair, resumed his inspection of the letter, as well as of some documents that lay upon the table before him. Hoffman sat down, and waited in silence, listening to the crackling of the fire, and won-

dering, meanwhile, whether he faced judge or executioner. The sombre aspect of his companion suggested the latter in no small degree.

His doubts were soon dispelled. The dark figure suddenly straightened, facing him with an enigmatic smile.

"You are Robert Hoffman?" he questioned.

"I am."

"On the sixteenth of the month you gave to His Excellency, the Military Governor, certain information regarding the movements of a British cruiser squadron."

"I did."

"Why?"

"I have already explained to the consul at Rotterdam, to the Military Governor here, that I desired to sell the information at a good price."

"Yes—yes! I understand that. You wished, no doubt, to conceal the fact that others are behind you, and thus make it appear that you are operating entirely upon your own responsibility? I quite approve of that course. You may, however, speak quite frankly to me."

"Who are you?" Hoffman asked.

The dark man fixed upon him a pair of unusually keen eyes.

"I represent the German secret service," he said. "Have the goodness to place upon this

sheet the impressions of your two thumbs." He pushed across the table a square of paper, and a small pad.

Hoffman did as he was requested. He felt that he was working in the dark. His questioner still appeared to regard him with suspicion.

Taking the sheet of paper containing the thumb-prints, the man at the desk placed it before him, and proceeded to inspect it with the utmost care, at the same time referring occasionally to the documents that he had been reading when Hoffman came in. Presently he looked up. The sombreness of his expression had in no degree relaxed. The American was quite unable to tell, from where he sat, whether his companion had referred to a second thumb-print, or not. He felt uneasy, surprised. A determination to find out whether the news he had brought had proven authentic, filled him.

"I trust that you were satisfied with the information I furnished," he said.

"It was correct, but of little value," the dark man observed dryly. "You failed to designate the names of the vessels composing the fleet, the port from which they were to sail, or their destination." He regarded Hoffman narrowly. "Information to be of use to us, must be first, accurate; second, complete; third, in advance.

Failure in any one of these particulars renders it valueless."

Hoffman felt that some explanation of his failure was necessary.

"I gave what information I had," he observed. "I was not in a position to ask questions."

"Why not?"

"Because, to have done so might have aroused suspicion."

"On the part of those so closely related to you as your sister's family? Do you mean to imply, for a moment, that they could suppose you a German spy? Absurd."

Hoffman felt that he must recover from the false position in which his words had suddenly placed him. He desired above all things to retain the confidence of this man, who seemed to be so completely informed concerning his affairs, his connections in London.

"No," he said. "They would under no circumstances think me a spy. In that respect I am perfectly safe. But they know very well that I am a writer, and might readily fear that I would make use, in that way, of such information as I might obtain."

"Ah! I see." The dark man seemed satisfied. He glanced at the document he still held

in his hands, then raised his head. "What do you wish to do now?" he asked. "The information you brought us, as I have told you, was valueless. Have you anything else to propose?"

"Only to say that I am ready to offer you my services. If you do not wish them, I have nothing further to say." He rose, with a frown of anger.

His words, his manner, produced an immediate effect. The man behind the desk waved him to his seat with a flickering, unhumorous smile.

"Come," he said, "do not be hasty. Although you have failed, this time, it is very possible that the next you may do much better. If so, you shall be well paid for it. Of course, it is impossible to fix such matters definitely in advance, but you may depend upon our generosity. In the meantime, an allowance will be made you, to cover your expenses. What do you say to five hundred marks a month, to be paid in advance, in any event, for three months? If, during that time, you have proven your worth, I will propose to you that you regularly enter our service. That, I understand, is your wish." He glanced significantly at the letter he held in his hands.

Hoffman remained silent for several mo-

ments. He had a feeling that his companion was testing him. He shrugged his shoulders, with a grim smile.

"Five hundred marks a month would not interest me in the least," he said. "I have some money of my own. I am not penniless."

"What, then, do you desire?"

"I need a large sum. Fifty thousand marks, at the least." He eyed the man across the desk coldly. It annoyed him that anyone would suppose that he, Bob Hoffman, would offer to play the spy for so trivial a sum as five hundred marks a month.

The dark little man rubbed his hands. He seemed rather pleased, than otherwise, at Hoffman's reply.

"I would rather pay you fifty thousand marks, than five hundred, my friend," he whispered. "But you must earn them. Send me information worth fifty thousand marks, and you shall have that sum."

"Would the names of the vesels in Admiral Sturdee's fleet, or the name of the port from which they sailed, be worth that much?" Hoffman asked.

"No, for we already know both—too late. Information, to be of value, must, as I have said, be advance information. If we knew, for instance, the route the English vessels are to

take, the ports at which they will coal; if you could tell us, in fine, their destination, their orders, you would render us a service worth fifty thousand marks, or even double that sum. Take my advice, young man. Accept the five hundred marks a month, for your expenses, and depend on our generosity to pay you adequately for whatever information you may furnish us."

Hoffman seemed to be weighing the matter carefully in his mind.

"Very well," he said, at length. "I will try it. I will send you such information as I may secure, from time to time, for three months. If, at the end of that period, you do not treat me handsomely, the deal is off. Is that agreed?"

"Yes. Here is your first month's advance." The man handed him a *rouleau* of English gold, and some silver. "Now as to the method of procedure."

"You mean, of course, the methods I am to pursue in order to get the information to you?" Hoffman asked.

"Precisely."

"I had supposed I would bring it, and deliver it to you in person."

"You could do that, of course," replied the other, "but it would be far better for you to be able to communicate with me more promptly. Movements of the enemy, important secrets, of

great value today, might be of no value whatever by the time you could reach Antwerp. You must be in direct communication with me at all times."

"How is that to be effected?" Hoffman asked.

The dark man fixed him with his sombre eyes.

"You live at the Grand Hotel, I understand," he remarked, referring to the notes before him.

"Yes. That is, I did. I have given up my room."

"You will not return there. Instead, you will take rooms at an address which I will give you. It is an excellent lodging-house, kept by a worthy woman named Shuttleworth. The rooms will already have been engaged, in your name, when you reach London."

"By whom?"

"That is of no importance to you."

"And after I get there, what? How am I to communicate with you?"

"In this way. When you have important news, go at once to your rooms, which are on the third floor. The sitting room, you will find, is in the rear, and has a bow window, overlooking a small garden, beyond which are the rears of a number of houses. The three windows in the bow have green holland shades. They are usually drawn half-way down, during the day, and all the way down, at night. When you wish to

communicate with us, during the daytime, raise the central shade to its full height, and draw down the two side shades. At night, reverse the process, being sure that the light in your sitting-room is burning."

"And then what?"

"Wait. Someone will come to you, or send you word what to do."

"It all seems very complicated," Hoffman observed.

"And also very safe," his companion said. "Here is the address, on Exmouth Street, and here are your passports, and other papers and belongings. You will leave Antwerp at six in the morning, and return to London at once. To-night, you will sleep here. I will have someone show you to your room." He rose, and Hoffman did likewise.

"What is your name?" Hoffman asked, suddenly.

"Does it matter?"

"But how am I to find you, when I wish to see you again?"

"Very simply. Come to Antwerp. Call on the Military Governor. Tell him you wish to communicate with Herr Schwartz. He will understand."

"And how shall I reach Antwerp? I might not be allowed to cross the frontier."

"Do as you did before. Our consul at Rotterdam will provide you with a passport at any time. He is so instructed."

Hoffman rose. Another thought occurred to him.

"Suppose it should become necessary," he said, "while in England, to suddenly make myself known to your agents?"

"Do not be afraid," Herr Schwartz replied, in purring tones. "You will be known to them." There was a suggestion, a menace, almost, in his words, his manner, that was not lost on the young American. It was evident that his every move, while in England, would be closely watched. Clearly, this man did not yet fully trust him. No doubt this was quite natural. He had no means of knowing what information, if any, had been forwarded concerning him from London. Herr Schwartz was fully informed about his affairs, he knew, but after all, he had given this information to the Military Governor, on his arrival in Antwerp, and the Governor had carefully written it all down. No doubt the secret agent had received a copy of the report. He determined to proceed in accordance with his instructions, leaving it to the future to show whether or not he had put his head into a noose.

A moment later, in response to the pushing of

a button on Herr Schwartz's desk, the young man whom Hoffman had seen in the hall entered the room.

"Carl," his superior said, "show Mr. Hoffman to the room you have had prepared for him. He will leave for London, by way of Rotterdam, early in the morning."

Herr Schwartz, left alone, resumed his seat. Some time later, the young man he had addressed as "Carl" re-entered the room. The secret agent looked up.

"Send Number 16 here," he said, shortly, then drew a sheet of paper toward him and began to write.

CHAPTER VI

THE twenty-four hours that elapsed, after Bob Hoffman's interview with Herr Schwartz, passed with the swiftness of a cinema film. His restless night, at the latter's house, his early morning drive to the train, in company with the secret agent's secretary, his vain attempt, in the darkness, to gain even the slightest impression of Antwerp in war times, his swift ride to Rotterdam, followed by the almost immediate boarding of the boat for Harwich, all flitted through his mind like the fragmentary impressions of a dream. That the experience had been real enough, however, was evidenced by the *rouleau* of English sovereigns that lay in his pocket.

It was not until the channel boat was nearing Harwich that anything happened to rouse his thoughts from the lethargy that had settled upon them.

He was standing on deck, in the waist of the vessel, gazing abstractedly down at the rolling green water, when he suddenly became aware of

a young woman, clutching the rail a short distance away.

The deck was deserted. The cold, the heavy sea, had driven most of the passengers to the saloon. Along the side of the vessel upon which he and the woman stood, were no other persons, with the exception of an elderly priest, who, grasping one of the boat davits some fifty feet away, stood with his back toward them, gazing off to sea.

The girl—Hoffman judged her to be not more than twenty years of age, seemed in great distress, to judge from her heaving shoulders, the tears which she continually dried with a lace-edged handkerchief.

She was slender, blonde, of medium size, very well, although simply dressed, and extremely good-looking. Hoffman was conscious of a feeling of sympathy for her, as he regarded her slender form, pressed tightly against the vessel's rail. She had come up very quietly, and now stood not more than five feet away.

Suddenly she turned, as though with sudden determination, and faced him. Her face was flushed, her expression one of fear.

"Monsieur," she said, in French, her eyes seeking his doubtfully. "Are you not American?"

"Yes," replied Hoffman, too astonished by

her sudden and unexpected action to say more.

"Ah! I was certain of it. I could see it from your face, and also, I could see that you are—kind."

"Kind?" Hoffman questioned, vaguely. The word had aroused in him a sudden suspicion. The girl observed it.

"Ah, monsieur, do not, I beg of you, misunderstand me! I am in great distress. I do not know what to do. I—I hoped that you might be willing to advise me, to assist me."

"In what way, mademoiselle? What is troubling you?"

"I will tell you. I am a Belgian. My father was killed, in the defense of Antwerp. Our home was destroyed in the bombardment. My mother has been dead for five years. When the Germans came, I found myself alone, penniless. I managed to escape to Holland. But, unfortunately, monsieur, my name, Liebmann, is a German one. My grandfather came from Alsace. Hence I am everywhere suspected of having German sympathies. But it is not true, monsieur. I entreat that you will believe me." She stood gazing at Hoffman with frightened eyes.

"I can understand your position, mademoiselle," he observed, wondering why the girl had

told him all this. "But in what way can I be of service to you?"

"I will tell you. In Holland I was everywhere followed by spies. They could do nothing to harm me, of course, on Dutch soil. But I feel sure that I am being followed still. I may not be permitted to land. Or if I am, I may at once be arrested by the English police, on account of my German name. You see my terrible position, monsieur. I entreat you to help me."

Hoffman listened to this curious recital in astonishment. Why had this young woman appealed to him? Why had she supposed that he could assist her? Was the whole thing a trap? Was the girl one of Herr Schwartz's agents, sent, perhaps, to test him, his loyalty? He realized that, should he interest himself in her case, by undertaking to assist her, he would be assisting an enemy of Germany, a step on his part that would be very likely to destroy the confidence which he hoped his new employer reposed in him. He turned to the girl, regarding her coldly, yet as his eyes met hers, tearful, frightened, he became almost ashamed of his suspicions.

"I do not see in what way I can be of service to you, mademoiselle," he presently remarked.

"I am merely a writer—a newspaper correspondent. I have no influence with the English authorities. Surely your passport, your papers, will enable you to land without difficulty."

"I am afraid—terribly afraid. At least do this much for me—take me ashore with you, as your friend. Say that you have known me for a long time, that we met in America, before the war. I have been in America, monsieur. If you will thus vouch for me, I feel sure that I shall have no difficulty."

There was a rising suspicion in Hoffman's mind, a suspicion that the girl's lovely eyes strove in vain to dispel. He found himself unable to decide whether to do as she asked, or not. An exaggerated, American sense of chivalry drove him in one direction, a vague fear of the woman and her purpose counselled another.

"Will you let me see your passport, mademoiselle?" he said at length. It had occurred to him that an examination of the girl's papers might throw some light on the truth or falsity of her story.

"Certainly, monsieur. It is in my satchel below. I will bring it to you at once. Will you wait here?"

"Yes."

"Thank you." With a brilliant smile, she left him, and soon Hoffman saw her slen-

der figure disappear down the companionway.

A moment later, the old priest, who had for the past quarter of an hour been standing immovable not far away, engaged in silent contemplation of the heavy sea, came slowly along the rail. He did not so much as glance at Hoffman nor, as he passed, did the latter observe any movement of the man's lips, and yet there distinctly came to him these significant words.

"Be on your guard! You are in danger."

Hoffman turned in astonishment. For a moment he felt inclined to follow the man, to learn, if possible, what he meant by his warning, but the reappearance of the girl at the entrance to the companionway checked this momentary impulse. Hoffman saw at once that he was surrounded by influences of which he knew nothing, was enmeshed in a web of circumstances the purpose of which was hidden from him. More than ever he realized that the slightest false move on his part might be fatal to him, that the course upon which he had embarked would require all his courage and wit.

In a moment the girl rejoined him, holding a folded paper in her hand. It proved to be the passport of which she had spoken. She gave it to him without comment.

Hoffman examined it carefully. It was made out in favor of one Gretchen Liebmann, spin-

ster, of Rotterdam, and appeared to be, so far as he could judge, in proper form. The girl was represented to be a Dutch subject.

"You see, monsieur," she explained, noting his momentary hesitation, "I am Belgian, not Dutch, but this passport was secured for me by friends, in order that I might appear as a neutral, and thus reach England in safety."

"I should not suppose you would have any difficulty, mademoiselle," Hoffman remarked, coldly. "Your papers seem to be in good order. In any event, I do not see how I can be of service to you. I have no influence with the English authorities."

The girl gave him a quick look.

"Are you not, then, a British sympathizer?" she asked.

Hoffman parried the thrust with an impassive countenance.

"I am an American, mademoiselle," he replied, "and consequently my sentiments are entirely neutral."

The girl seemed intensely disappointed. Suddenly she looked along the deck, then gave a little gasp of dismay. Her fingers closed convulsively upon Hoffman's arm.

"That man who is coming toward us," she whispered. "No. Do not turn. He is going to pass. He is a spy, monsieur. I saw him in

Rotterdam. He followed me everywhere. He is following me now." She paused, as the person of whom she spoke went by, without looking either to the right or the left. Hoffman observed him with astonishment. It was the old priest.

"What makes you think him a spy?" he managed to ask, without betraying his astonishment in any way.

"Because of the way he has followed me—looked at me. I am certain that I shall be arrested, as soon as I land."

"But, mademoiselle," Hoffman replied. "If, as you fear, the man is a German spy, he will be quite powerless, once you have set foot in England. He could not take you back to Belgium. In fact, you need only to denounce him, to have him arrested himself."

"But, suppose he is not a German spy, but an English one, who thinks, because of my name, that I am German?"

"In that event, mademoiselle, your safety will probably depend entirely upon the truth of the story you have told me. Many of the Belgian refugees who have sought safety in England have German names. I see no reason why you should be subjected to any persecution, if you are telling me the truth."

For a moment the woman stood regarding

him, irresolute. Then the expression of her face changed. She spoke rapidly, excitedly, yet in low tones.

"I have *not* been telling you the truth, monsieur. I have not dared to. But now I will. I will throw myself on your generosity. I *am* a German. I am coming to England on a secret mission. It is imperative that I should land. If you are a British sympathizer, you have only to turn me over to the police. If your sentiments are with Germany you will do as I ask, you will say that we are old friends, that you know me to be a Belgian, that you have met me in America. I need only your help, to insure my safety. Will you give it to me?" She faced him, eager, expectant.

This time Hoffman found himself in a difficulty from which there seemed no possible way of extricating himself. If the woman was in reality a German spy, an agent, perhaps, of Herr Schwartz himself, it was his duty, a duty he did not dare evade, to help her. But should it prove that she was a member of the English secret service, engaged in an attempt to trap him, it would be fatal, he well knew, to interest himself in her case. The two horns of the dilemma extended before him. Upon which must he impale himself?

"Before I can tell you anything, mademoi-

selle," he remarked steadily, "I must know more about you. How can I be sure that you are what you represent yourself to be?"

She had anticipated the objection, and met it.

"If I were not," she said, "would I know from whom you received the five hundred marks, in English gold, that you now have in your pocket?"

The proof seemed staggering. Yet Hoffman remembered distinctly that shortly before the girl met him, he had taken the roll of gold from his pocket, and looked at it. After all, if she had seen this action on his part, her words might be no more than a shrewd guess. And the old priest had warned him against her. He would have given anything to have had a few minutes' talk with the latter.

"I cannot say, mademoiselle," he answered, "whether you would know where the gold you claim I have in my pocket came from or not. Do you?"

"Yes. From Herr Schwartz!"

She spoke the words with a significant smile. Hoffman recognized at once that the sombre man in Antwerp had not spoken idly, when he said that his agents would know him. He met the girl's smile with an expression of relief.

"In that event, mademoiselle," he said, "I shall certainly do all in my power to assist you.

But I fear it will be very little. As I have told you before, I have no influence with the English authorities."

"What I have asked you to do will, I think, be sufficient. If it is not, you will be obliged to call for assistance upon your brother-in-law, Lord Brooke. I come to London to help you. Acting under instructions, I have put you through a test which you have met. I was not to reveal myself to you until you had done so. Herr Schwartz is a remarkable man. He reasons well. You came to him with certain recommendations, but there was always a chance that you might be playing him false. If you are, you will betray me, and in so doing betray yourself. If you are not, you will assist me in every way in your power. My safety, in England, depends on you. And should you fail in your part, or seek in any way to avoid it, I shall myself carry out the work which you have failed to do."

Hoffman tried in vain to avoid showing the astonishment the woman's words caused him.

"Herr Schwartz is over-cautious," he said. "After all, his precautions are useless. Were I what he feared, if I had a mind to deceive him, it would be easy for me to point you out, in secret, to the English police, and they would then

arrest you, without my seeming to be in any way responsible for it."

The girl shook her head, a faint smile played about her lips.

"Do you think so?" she said. "Evidently you are not skilled in work of this sort. An hour after I land in England, Gretchen Liebmann will have disappeared. I have many disguises, monsieur. Even you will never see me, as I am, again. Any move on your part to betray me would completely fail. And it is a practice of our service, monsieur, to turn even our failures to account. Should you prove to be one of them, you will find that we have not suffered. But why talk in this strain? I am fully prepared to believe that you are with us."

"I risked my life to prove it," Hoffman replied, gloomily. "It seems that your employer is very hard to convince."

"Of necessity. He cannot afford to take chances. What you really are will depend upon your actions from now on. Here comes that priest again."

"Do you really think he is an English spy?" Hoffman muttered.

"No." The girl laughed. "I said that only to test you, to see whether you would take my part. You were very cautious, my friend; I

congratulate you upon it. For all I know, the man may be one of the agents of Herr Schwartz himself."

"But, would you not know him?"

"Certainly not. It is only in special cases that such things are revealed. I saw him in Rotterdam, it is true, but only as we were boarding the boat. I do not think that he has once looked at me." She paused, and glanced at the passport in her hand. "I will replace this with my other papers," she said. "We will land in half an hour. Join me in the saloon, when the vessel arrives at the dock." With a nod she left him. Hoffman observed that the old priest had resumed his post alongside the rail. Much as he would have liked to speak to him, he did not dare to make the attempt. Lighting a cigar, he made his way to the smoking-room, hoping that the priest might follow. To communicate with the man, in some way, as soon as possible, was, he felt, imperative.

The opportunity came sooner than he expected. The priest came in, and glancing about the almost empty room, took a seat at its further end. Then, calling the waiter, he ordered a cup of coffee.

The waiter crossed the room, came up to Hoffman, and laid a menu card before him, containing a list of the drinkables and other things

served in the smoking room. Immediately he went away.

Hoffman, glancing idly at the card, saw some words written in pencil upon it.

"What do you wish to say to me?" the communication read. Immediately he saw that the priest had his eyes fixed upon him in a most significant way.

Taking out his pencil, Hoffman rapidly inscribed a few words below the other's message.

"The woman is working with me. Help me to get her ashore." He signed the message with the number "424," turned it upside down, and at a nod from the man opposite, gave it to the waiter who had by now returned with the other's coffee. Hoffman saw with satisfaction that he placed the menu, still upside down, upon the priest's table along with the coffee he had brought.

It was quite some time before the old man turned the card over. Then Hoffman saw him read the message, and give a quick nod. Unobserved, he then dropped the menu into his lap, and later secreted it in one of the pockets of his great coat. Not once again did he glance in Hoffman's direction.

The latter rose, and joined Mademoiselle Liebmann in the saloon. She seemed quite calm and self-possessed.

"What have you been doing with yourself, *mon ami?*" she asked, gaily.

"I had a cigar in the smoking-room," Hoffman replied.

"Yes." She laughed. "I saw you through the window."

Nothing more was said, and they crossed the gang-plank to the dock. The examination, so far as Hoffman and his companion were concerned, was brief and formal. No objection was made to the credentials presented by either. The Liebmann woman left him at once, and he failed to see either her, or the old priest, on the arrival of the train in London. Taking a cab, he drove at once to the address in Exmouth Street given him by Herr Schwartz.

The house in Exmouth Street proved to be a small, old-fashioned place, of unpretentious aspect, yet conveniently located, and of a fairly comfortable and homelike appearance.

The landlady, Mrs. Shuttleworth, was a cheery-looking Englishwoman of the middle class, stout and bustling, the last person in the world that anyone would have suspected of being a German secret service agent. Nor had Hoffman any reason to think that she was. Herr Schwartz's representatives could readily have rented the rooms for him, without the

woman knowing anything of the reasons behind their action.

Hoffman went up to the rooms, which he found to be a comfortable sitting-room, with bed-chamber adjoining. They were on the third floor, in the rear of the house, and the bow window of the sitting-room overlooked a garden, with the rear windows of a number of houses opposite, just as Herr Schwartz had said. Having his luggage brought up, Hoffman made a hasty toilet, and, after securing a light supper, drove to Lord Brooke's. He had been away from London eight days. It seemed to him as many months. He wondered what Patricia would have to say to him.

CHAPTER VII

THE Honorable Patricia Burke was a young woman of very decided likes and dislikes. Also, she had a kind heart. Consequently, when, one cold night, a woman called to see her who described herself as a refugee from France, she affected not to notice the upturned nose of Patrick, the butler, who referred to the caller as "a foreign-looking person," and went down to interview the woman herself.

Crouched on a leather-covered seat in the hall was a slight, good-looking young girl, with large, eager eyes, and heavy black hair. Her clothing was scanty and poor, her shoes worn, her whole appearance that of one who has suffered much hardship. On the floor beside her stood a shabby leather bag.

"What can I do for you, my girl?" Patricia asked, in French.

The woman replied eagerly.

"I am starving, mademoiselle. I have but just arrived from Paris. I was there employed, as seamstress, in one of the great houses which make the costumes, the gowns. Now there is no more work. The proprietor has gone with the

army. The place is closed. I must live, mademoiselle, and so I came to your so great city to find work. I sew very well, mademoiselle. Can you not perhaps employ me?"

"What is your name?" Patricia asked, coldly.

"Violette, mademoiselle. Violette Mercier."

"You have your passport, your credentials?"

"Oh, but yes, mademoiselle. They are here. You will look at them, yes?" She hastily opened her satchel, and taking out a package of papers, thrust them into Patricia's hand.

The latter examined them with deliberate care. She felt sorry for this creature, homeless, alone, cast by the necessities of a senseless war upon the mercy of strangers. Also, by some curious fate, it happened that Lady Brooke's regular seamstress had, but the day before, announced that she had received a splendid offer to accompany a wealthy American woman to New York, and would her ladyship be so good as to permit her to go.

Miss Martin, the former seamstress, had been an efficient and honest servant, but when, with bulging eyes, she announced the wages that had been offered her, Lady Brooke had let her go at once. She thought it rather a shabby trick on the part of the girl's prospective employer, but then, being an American herself, she understood.

It did not occur to Patricia's unsuspicious nature, that there could be any connection between Miss Martin's departure on one day, and the arrival, so providentially, of Mademoiselle Mercier, also a seamstress, on the next. The coincidence, if it struck her at all, impressed her as being rather fortunate than otherwise. She summoned Patrick, ordered him to conduct the young woman to the servants' hall and give her something to eat, then, going to the library, showed the girl's papers, which she had retained, to her brother and his wife.

"You know, Nelly," she said to Lady Brooke, "we 've been wondering where on earth we could find anyone to take Martin's place, and now we have a chance to get a real French milliner, who has been making gowns and things at one of the big Parisian costumers. It 's the luckiest thing in the world, don't you think?"

"Where is the woman?" Lady Brooke asked.

"I told Patrick to see that she had something to eat. She looked half-starved."

Lord Brooke, meanwhile, had been examining the papers. They consisted of a passport, in proper form, and a number of letters from persons in Paris, recommending Mademoiselle Violette Mercier to the kind attention of any or all possible employers in England. In addition,

there were one or two personal letters, in a feminine handwriting, which Lord Brooke did not read.

"Everything here seems to be all right," he said, handing the papers back to his sister. "But I 'm not in favor of employing strangers, especially foreigners, no matter how well recommended they may seem to be. There is always a chance that they may be spies, you know."

"But—how could she have these letters, this passport, if everything were not all right?" Patricia objected.

"I cannot say, of course, although there are many ways in which such credentials could be obtained. I heard of a most interesting case, only the other day. A fellow came to the house of one of the biggest men in the Cabinet, and solicited a position as chauffeur. He had learned, in some way, that the former chauffeur had just been ordered to join his regiment. The man said he was a Belgian and had a full line of credentials, recommendations, etc., showing that, owing to a weakness in the legs, he could not serve in the army. He was about to be given the place, when it was suddenly discovered that the real Belgian to whom the credentials belonged had died in the hospital a few days be-

fore. The papers had in some way been stolen, and the man had assumed the other's name. He was undoubtedly a secret agent.

"What was done to him?"

"I understand he is in the Tower, awaiting trial."

"Then you think we had better send this woman away?" Lady Brooke asked.

"I believe it would be wiser, my dear."

As he spoke, Patrick, the butler, came to the door of the room.

"There is a gentleman calling on your lordship. He requested me to give your lordship this card."

Lord Brooke took the card, and glanced at it. Then he rose.

"You will show the gentleman to my study, Patrick," he said. "I will join him there at once." At the door he turned. "Decide nothing about that Frenchwoman until you hear from me," he said.

The two women glanced at each other, then Lady Brooke picked up the card, which her husband had left on the table.

"Arthur Matthews, Scotland Yard," she read, glancing at her sister. "It would be rather remarkable, my dear," she observed, "would n't it, if your young seamstress should turn out to be a German spy?"

"I don't believe it for a moment," Patricia returned, taking up a magazine. "She looked far too poor and hungry."

Lord Brooke returned in a very few moments. There was a peculiar expression upon his face.

"You will engage that young Frenchwoman, my dear," he said to Lady Brooke. "And I particularly desire that you should treat her kindly, and show her every courtesy."

"But," interposed Lady Brooke with a smile, "only a few moments ago you were insisting that she was in all probability a suspicious character."

"I was mistaken, my dear. I want the woman here. I cannot tell you my reasons, but I am sure you will realize that they are good ones."

His manner indicated that he did not wish to discuss the matter further. Accompanied by Patricia, Lady Brooke went to interview the new applicant for the position of seamstress.

A few moments later, Patrick again appeared in the library, and announced that Mr. Hoffman was calling. Lord Brooke threw down his newspaper.

"Hoffman!" he exclaimed, jumping to his feet. "Show him in at once."

The two men met with a certain feeling of restraint. Hoffman was conscious that he must

offer some explanation of his sudden disappearance. To his surprise, his brother-in-law asked for none.

"My dear chap!" he cried, extending his hand in sincere welcome. "I 'm delighted to see you."

"I suppose you 've been wondering what had become of me?" Hoffman remarked, rather lamely.

"Not at all. In these stirring times, I 'm prepared for anything. As a matter of fact, I concluded that you had realized your ambitions and gone to the front."

"No such luck," Hoffman replied, with a smile. "I went as far as Rotterdam, hoping to get a sight of some fighting, but I was completely unsuccessful. Nothing to do but to return."

"That 's too bad. What are your plans now? To stop in London?"

"Yes. For a while, at least. What 's new here?"

"Nothing much. Sturdee sailed, with his battle cruisers, two days ago. I suppose the next thing we 'll hear will be that he has met the Germans, and sent them to the bottom."

"If he succeeds in finding them," Hoffman observed, without particular interest. He had

made up his mind not to ask his brother-in-law any leading questions.

"He 'll find them, I fancy," Lord Brooke replied. "We 've learned, on reliable authority, that von Spee has sailed southward, and is rounding the Horn. Sturdee will make for the Falkland Islands, joining the battleship *Canopus.*"

"Is that generally known?" Hoffman asked.

"Lord, no. You don't suppose we 'd publish a thing like that. Our German friends are far too clever to permit our taking them into our confidence to such an extent. No one knows Sturdee's destination, or even that he has sailed at all. The plan is to rendezvous at Port William, and coal there. The place is fortified, but the defenses don't amount to much. Then, having coaled, they will strike von Spee as he sails north from the Horn. He won't suspect the presence of battle cruisers in that vicinity, but will probably be looking for the *Canopus.* She carried twelve-inch guns, of course, but is slow and old. I fancy, if the fast German cruisers knew where she was, they could make short work of her. Luckily they don't. Have a cigar, won't you? What 's the matter with you, anyway? You look as pale as a ghost."

He spoke the truth. Hoffman was pale.

The information that Lord Brooke had just showered upon him was the very information that Herr Schwartz most desired. He had said, quite frankly, that it would be worth to him, not only fifty thousand marks, but double that amount. Here it was, ready to his hand, poured out with a prodigality that to the young American seemed absolutely startling. He was ready to carry out the instructions under which he was acting, but he had not expected that Lord Brooke would render everything so easy for him. He had been in the latter's presence scarcely five minutes, when he was furnished with the very information he came to seek. Either his brother-in-law was stupidly garrulous, or his confidence in Hoffman's integrity was absolute. In his heart, Hoffman felt that the latter explanation was the true one.

"I suppose there is plenty of coal at Port William," he remarked, more for the purpose of keeping up the conversation, than because of any deep interest in it. Of course there was coal. The Britsh navy fully understood the value of coaling stations.

"That 's just the point," Lord Brooke replied. "There is n't. But there will be before the fleet arrives. At least half a dozen vessels have been ordered to proceed to the Falklands from South American ports. By the time the

fleet arrives, they will be on the ground, and the yards filled. All these matters have been thoroughly attended to. The Admiralty is very wide-awake. We fully realize the gravity of the situation."

Hoffman made no reply. He wondered if his brother-in-law would commit himself further. It seemed incredible. He sat, revolving in his mind the singular situation in which the fates had placed him.

"How 's Patricia?" he suddenly asked.

"Oh, Pat is well enough. Just at present she 's engaged in securing a new seamstress—a Frenchwoman, just arrived from Paris, without a penny to her name. Poor devil. I told them to give her a chance."

As he spoke, Patricia appeared in the doorway. Seeing Hoffman, she started forward with a pleased smile.

"Bob!" she exclaimed. "Where on earth have you been for the past week? Nelly and I thought you must be lost."

Hoffman took her hand, inwardly cursing the instructions that had forbidden him from making his sister and Patricia acquainted with his movements.

"I ran over to Rotterdam for a few days," he said, "but it did n't amount to anything. I guess I 'm a failure as a war correspondent."

"Nonsense," Patricia replied, then turned as Lady Brooke appeared in the doorway, followed by the new seamstress. "Alan," Patricia went on, "Nelly and I have decided to let you interview Mademoiselle Mercier. She 's had her supper, and feels better. We think, in the circumstances, that you had better see her, before she is engaged. You might like to ask her some questions."

As she concluded, Lady Brooke stepped forward. After her came a dejected figure in black. "This is Mademoiselle Mercier," she said.

Hoffman regarded the young woman with widening eyes. In spite of her black hair, her threadbare clothing, he recognized at once the girl who had spoken to him on the boat from Rotterdam to Harwich. Mademoiselle Mercier and Gretchen Liebmann, the self-confessed agent of Herr Schwartz, were one and the same.

The girl met his gaze without the least sign of recognition. What was she doing here, he wondered? She had announced herself, on the boat, as his assistant. Doubtless she was much more than that. It was quite clear that Herr Schwartz did not intend to allow his newly appointed agent to operate except under the watchful eyes of his office. And this woman, whose character he well knew, was on the point

of becoming a member of Lord Brooke's household, to report the daily doings of its members to her chief at Antwerp. The thought somehow annoyed him, and yet, she was doing, could do, no more than he was doing himself. He turned away, with a feeling of disgust. Patricia had been right. The position of a spy was a despicable one. Unable longer to endure the situation in which he found himself, he pleaded an engagement and hurried away. He thought that Patricia regarded him curiously, as she bade him good-night, but he was in no mood to satisfy her curiosity. Bigger affairs called him. He hastened to his rooms.

CHAPTER VIII

IT was close to ten o'clock when Bob Hoffman left his brother-in-law's house. He stood for a few moments on the sidewalk looking for a cab. His eyes wandered, from time to time, back to the house he had just left, as though he expected someone to join him, but no one came. The street remained quite deserted.

Because of Lord Brooke's singular garrulity, to call it nothing worse, he was now in possession of amazing information, information of the utmost value to his new employer, Herr Schwartz. It was clear that he must transmit it to Antwerp without delay. Yet something seemed to deter him, some contrary motive seemed operating to hold him back. A moment later, seeing a cab slowly approaching through the darkness, he raised his hand. The cabman drove up with a flourish.

Hoffman stepped in.

"Drive me to"—he gave the number of the house in Exmouth Street.

The man nodded, and they started off. Hoffman sat quietly, puffing at a cigar. When the

vehicle had progressed for some ten minutes, he rapped sharply on the glass, and having attracted the driver's attention, gave him a second direction. The man nodded, then went on.

Presently they drew up before an imposing hotel. Hoffman got out and paid the driver his fare. "I 've decided to get a bit of supper before I turn in," he said. "You need not wait."

As he entered the doorway, he glanced back. The cab was still standing alongside the curb. Hoffman smiled slightly, and going to the grill-room, selected a secluded table and ordered a chop and some ale.

While waiting for them to be brought, he occupied himself with an evening paper. A close observer, however, would have seen that he read it without interest, and that every few moments he cast a keen and scrutinizing glance about the place.

It was not long before a slim, dark young fellow, with closely cropped moustaches and a sallow complexion, crossed the room, as though searching for someone, and presently, espying Hoffman, went up to him and touched him on the shoulder.

"Mr. Hoffman?" he inquired, pleasantly.

The latter nodded.

"That is my name," he said. "But you have the advantage of me."

The young man continued to smile, and at the same time dropped into a chair.

"It is not important," he said, "who I am. I merely stopped for a moment, to give you a bit of advice."

"Advice?" Hoffman queried, with a puzzled look.

"Yes." The man's manner suddenly underwent a subtle change. It became stern, almost commanding. His next words filled Hoffman with astonishment.

"The window shades in your sitting-room need adjusting," he said. "I thought perhaps you might have forgotten it."

"I stopped for something to eat," Hoffman began.

"There are duties more important than eating," the young man interrupted, then rose quickly to his feet.

"How am I to account for your knowledge of —window shades?" Hoffman asked.

The other paused, then pointing for a moment at the table, hastened away. A moment later he had left the room.

Hoffman glanced down at the white cloth. His companion of a moment before had been idly toying with a pepper cruet. On the tablecloth, in vague but unmistakable characters, were the numbers 424.

The waiter, arriving with the chop and ale, brushed the pepper away with his napkin. Hoffman swallowed the food without relish, dismissed from his mind an intention that had been forming therein ever since his departure from Lord Brooke's, and proceeded without further delay to his rooms. The young man's advice suddenly appeared to him very good.

He went back, in his thoughts, to the instructions so carefully given to him in Antwerp. To communicate at night, he was first to see that the lights in his sitting-room were turned on. He was then to lower completely the central shade of the bow window, and raise the two side shades. He proceeded to carry out these instructions at once. Then, there being nothing else to do, he sat down to wait.

Five minutes passed—ten—fifteen, without anything happening. Thinking that he might be expected to watch for some signal from without, he peered cautiously through the unshaded panes at either side of the bow. The view commanded the rear windows of many houses, to right and left. Some of these windows were lighted, some dark, but nothing about any of them attracted his attention in the least. As he turned once more to the interior of the room, he heard the sound of someone knocking, and at once proceeded to open the door.

On the threshold stood a neat serving maid, whom he had not seen on his arrival earlier in the evening. She informed him that the cab he had ordered was waitng for him below.

The fact that he had not ordered any cab was unimportant. Throwing on his greatcoat, Hoffman picked up a heavy stick and descended to the street.

A smart-looking motor car was drawn up alongside the curb. Hoffman saw the driver regarding him keenly. A moment later he nodded, jumped to the sidewalk, and threw open the cab door.

"Where are you to take me?" Hoffman asked.

The man shook his head.

"I am instructed to say nothing," he replied. "You will get in, please."

Without saying anything further, Hoffman entered the cab. He felt himself in the grasp of forces of which he knew nothing—that surrounded him, invisible, yet apparently dogging his every footstep, reading, almost, his very thoughts. He sank back on the cushions. The cab, he observed, was passing through one darkened street after another, at a rapid rate. Before five minutes had elapsed, Hoffman, unfamiliar with the London streets, realized that he had not the slightest idea of the direction they were taking.

It was clear that those for whom he was working did not trust him. The presence of the Liebmann woman at Lord Brooke's, the sallow young man at the hotel, the uncommunicative driver of the vehicle in which he now found himself, all demonstrated the fact amply. Why had not one of Herr Schwartz's representatives come boldly to his sitting-room, and received the information he had to impart, instead of taking him to some unknown destination by automobile? Was it lack of confidence in him? Or was it, perhaps, due to fear that his movements were in turn being watched by the English police? He could not tell, but if the latter supposition were true, there was no doubt that Herr Schwartz was acting with admirable caution.

The car swung along, at top speed, for nearly an hour. Presently Hoffman felt, from its slackening motion, that it was about to stop. He glanced out of the window, and found himself in a deserted street, lined with detached houses, all looking gloomy and vague in the darkness.

Near the top of the street was a stone gateway, giving entrance to a small park, containing some shrubbery and trees, their bare branches black against the brilliant night sky. Hoffman was just able to discern the bulking mass of a large house amongst them, when the car drew

up at the door. Through a fanlight came a few faint rays of light.

Hoffman got out and looked about him. The darkness was intense. He had not the slightest idea where he was, nor the least clue whereby he might identify the place, in case he had any need to do so.

The driver of the cab had gotten out as well, and going to the door of the house, beckoned to Hoffman to follow him. The latter did so at once. A moment later they found themselves in a small square vestibule.

The guide knocked, in a peculiar way, disdaining the electric bell at one side of the doorway. At once the door was thrown open, and a bearded face appeared.

"All right, comrade," the cab driver said. "He is here."

"Come in." The bearded man drew the door open, and Hoffman went inside, the chauffeur bringing up the rear. Hoffman had not the slightest doubt that the hand the latter so carefully kept in his overcoat pocket held an automatic pistol.

Once inside the hall, the two men exchanged a few words in German, then the cab driver went out again, and the man with the beard motioned to Hoffman to enter a room at the rear of the hall.

It was brilliantly illuminated, but Hoffman perceived at once that no light could penetrate the windows, heavily shuttered, and covered with thick dark curtains.

In the center of the room was a square table, at which sat a young man with some electrical apparatus before him. He looked up as Hoffman entered, but said nothing. The bearded man motioned to a chair.

"Your name is Hoffman?" he said.

"Yes," the latter answered.

"Have you anything to report?"

"Yes."

"Good. What is it?"

"The British squadron under Admiral Sturdee is bound for Port William, in the Falkland Islands."

"Yes—yes—go on!" The man made some rapid notes. His companion put down the work he was engaged upon, and listened with eager interest.

"They will join the battleship *Canopus* there, and coal. Vessels bringing the fuel are on the way from South American ports. They will lie in wait there for Admiral von Spee, who is reported to have sailed south with the intention of rounding the Horn."

"Good! Good!" the older man muttered. "Is that all?"

"That is all. Is it not enough?"

"Yes. Now we know where they are." He rubbed his hands, and a glare of anger came into his eyes. "Coal from South American ports—just so. Helmuth, you will transmit this to Antwerp at once."

The younger man rose, and made a military salute.

"Shall I use the wireless, or the carrier pigeons?" he asked.

"Both. We can can take no chances. And a verbal message by Koch as well."

Again the young man saluted, then left the room. His companion turned to Hoffman with a pleased smile.

"You have brought good news, my friend. Very good news. I have received instructions from Herr Schwartz to make you a payment. Here are ten thousand marks, in English banknotes and gold." He went to a safe, at the far side of the room, and opened it. "You will receive more, when you next see Herr Schwartz in Antwerp. He wishes to treat you very generously."

Mechanically Hoffman took the banknotes and gold, and thrust them into his overcoat pocket, without counting them.

"Where am I?" he asked.

The bearded man frowned slightly.

"It is not necessary that you should know."

"But—how am I to return home?"

"In the automobile, as you came. It is now waiting."

"You do not, then, trust me?"

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"I carry out my instructions. See that you do the same."

Hoffman saw that nothing further was to be gained by questioning his companion along these lines. There was nothing for him to do, but return home as he had come. It was clear that not yet did his new employers place any very great confidence in him. He had been brought to this house, it was true, but under conditions that made it quite out of the question for him to ever locate it again. If they feared, in spite of the information he so frankly gave them, that he might have some ulterior motive in doing so, they had taken excellent precautions. He had met this bearded man, it was true, and could doubtless identify him, or his companion, in case he should ever see either of them again, but, except as he had seen them now, it was unlikely that he would be given the chance. And he wanted no such chance. He was carrying out, to the letter, the instructions that had been given him. Nothing more, it appeared, was expected, or desired. He turned toward the door,

then stopped, as a new thought occurred to him.

"At the house at which I secured the information I have just given you," he said, "a young girl has just been employed. Her name—one of them, at least—is Gretchen Liebmann. She told me, on the boat coming from Rotterdam, that she had been sent by Herr Schwartz to act as my assistant. Is this true? Am I to trust her?"

The bearded man regarded Hoffman with an uncomprehending stare.

"I can give you no information," he said. "I know nothing of any Gretchen Liebmann. Herr Schwartz has many agents. There are also many of the enemy, who would like to gain your confidence. My advice to you is to do your duty, and pay no attention to others. The least indiscretion will certainly cost you your life. Not only would the enemy take swift revenge, but I am informed that Herr Schwartz himself never forgives either treachery or stupidity. Good-night." He threw open the door leading to the hall.

Hoffman passed out. At once his companion opened the outside door. The man who had driven the cab stood outside, like a sentry on guard. His hand was still in his overcoat pocket. Without a word he led the way to the cab, and soon Hoffman found himself being

whirled homeward through the darkness at an even swifter pace than he had come. An hour later he was again sitting in his rooms in Exmouth Street. But for the arrangement of the shades, the money in his pocket, the whole thing might have been a strange dream.

Still one more sensation, however, was reserved for him, before he went to bed. As he turned to the sitting-room table for a match, to light the cigarette he had just taken from his case, he saw a letter lying upon it.

It was contained in a large, square envelope. The handwriting, feminine in its character, was unfamiliar to him. He tore the letter open, and glanced at its contents. It was from Patricia, the first he had ever received from her.

"Dear Bob," it read. "I am troubled greatly about a certain matter, and want your advice and help. Take luncheon with me tomorrow at one. Alan and Nelly will both be out. I hope you wi'l not fail me.

"Patricia Brooke."

Hoffman turned in, but for a long time could not sleep. In some vague way he felt that the thing that was troubling the young English girl had to do with himself and the work upon which he was engaged.

CHAPTER IX

PATRICIA BROOKE, in spite of her brother's insistence that Mademoiselle Mercier, the little French seamstress, should be given work, could not shake off a feeling of distrust of the girl. She had not been conscious of it at first, but throughout the evening the feeling had persisted—grown. Then, just as she was about to retire, Patrick, the butler, came to her where she sat in the library. Her brother and Lady Brooke had already sought their rooms. Patrick apologized for speaking; he had not liked the "French person" from the first, now he came to say, as perhaps he should not, that the young woman's first request, after being shown her room, was for pen and paper, that she had thereupon written a letter, which she seemed extremely anxious to post at once. Patrick explained that he had offered to send it out by one of the grooms, who slept out, but the Frenchwoman had refused to part with the letter, and went out to post it herself. Patrick thought this very queer indeed, and so, it must

be confessed, did Patricia. The butler's story increased her suspicions. To say anything further about the matter to Alan, or Lady Brooke, would manifestly be useless. Her brother had insisted, most pointedly, that the girl should be retained. What was the reason for this? Alan was notoriously the least suspicious, the most generous, of men. Then Patricia thought of Bob Hoffman. A sudden impulse to confide in him, to talk matters over with him, came over her. She asked Patrick if the groom had gone. Patrick thought not—he would go and find out. Meanwhile Patricia wrote the letter that Hoffman later received. The groom had not gone. Patricia gave the letter to him, with a shilling, and asked that it be delivered promptly at the young American's address.

In response to it, Hoffman appeared at one o'clock the next day, filled with a great curiosity to know what the girl had on her mind.

She received him in the drawing-room, her suspicions of the night before intensified, if anything, by an incident that had taken place during the morning.

Her brother and his wife had gone out, shortly after breakfast, the one, to his duties at the Admiralty, the other, to attend to some shopping. With the exception of the servants, she was alone in the house. Mademoiselle Mercier,

the new seamstress, she had given a quantity of work to do, some new linen to be marked, some mending, and had left her in the sewing-room on the first floor, at the rear of the house. Coming downstairs rather suddenly, about noon, to get a book from the library, she had seen the girl in the rear hall, upon which Lord Brooke's study, as well as the sewing-room, opened. She was rather nearer the door of the study, than that of the sewing-room, and Patricia was quite unable to account for her presence there. Being a young woman of determination, she had called the girl and asked for an explanation. The seamstress supplied one promptly. She had desired a glass of water, and being unfamiliar with the house, and not knowing how to obtain one, had wandered out into the hall, in the hope of finding one of the other servants.

Patricia had been obliged to accept the explanation, without in the least believing it, and the Frenchwoman had retired to her work.

Hoffman was conscious of a more rapid beating of the heart than was usual with him, as Patricia entered the library. The girl, he thought to himself, had never seemed so charming. Her grey morning gown robbed her figure of some of its accustomed smartness, and gave a more intimate and feminine note to her appearance. Her hair, loosely arranged, softened the

strength and determination of her features, without in any way weakening them. A heightened color, due perhaps to Hoffman's presence, rendered her altogether charming. She expressed her pleasure at seeing him, and they made their way to the dining-room, where luncheon was already served.

During the meal, Patricia did not say much concerning her suspicions. She trusted Patrick implicitly but still considered it wiser to discuss the matter with Hoffman alone. It was not until they had finished the meal, and returned to the library, that she explained the purpose of her letter.

"It 's about this Mercier girl," she said, "that I wanted to speak to you. I don't trust her."

"Why not?" Hoffman asked. He did not add that he felt very much the same way himself. The woman claimed to be an agent of Herr Schwartz. Was she, or not? He would have liked very much to know.

Patricia told him about the letter which the young woman had insisted on posting herself, and also about the incident of the morning.

"I suppose it will seem very silly to you," she said, "that I should feel as I do, with so little cause, but—perhaps it 's what you men call a woman's intuition."

Hoffman considered the matter for a moment. The evidence, if such it could be called, was certainly not very convincing.

"Would you mind telling me," he said, "how the woman happened to be employed in the first place?"

"Oh! I supposed you knew. But of course you could n't have known. She came here last night, about an hour before you did, and asked for work. She said she had just arrived from Paris, and was a first-class seamstress. Our other woman, Martin, had just left, to take a better position, at much higher wages, so I was rather pleased, of course."

Hoffman nodded, his face grave. One thing at least he knew very well. The woman was not French, and she had *not* just arrived from Paris.

"She had credentials—a passport, of course," he asked.

"Oh, yes. All in perfectly good form. I took them up and showed them to Alan, while the woman was being given some supper."

"And what did Alan say?"

"Why, that 's the queer part of it, and it explains, too, why I am talking the matter over with you, instead of with him, and Nelly. Alan was at first quite opposed to our taking the woman on—seemed to fear that she might be a

spy, and all that. He even told us a story of a chauffeur, who had been caught with another man's papers. Nelly had about decided to send the girl away."

"Why didn't she?"

"Because, at that moment, Patrick brought up a card, and said that the man who sent it wished to see Alan at once. He was shown into the study and Alan saw him there. In a few minutes Alan came back, and the first thing he said was that we were to engage the woman, and treat her with every courtesy."

Hoffman's eyes lit up with interest.

"That's queer," he said. "Didn't your brother offer any explanation?"

"None. But there was an explanation, nevertheless. The man that called on Alan came from Scotland Yard."

"Scotland Yard!" Hoffman leaned eagerly forward. "Are you sure?"

"Perfectly."

"Then—why do you think the woman is a spy? Isn't it far more likely that she is a member of the English secret service?"

"I thought of that, of course, but if she had been one of our people, I should certainly think that the information about her, whatever it was, that the man brought to Alan would have come *before* she was placed here in the house, not

afterward. I could n't help thinking that she was someone who had been followed here by the police. After all, what possible reason could there be, for placing a secret agent here in our house? Alan is n't under suspicion."

Hoffman began to think very quickly. If Alan were not under suspicion, could it be he, himself, who was? Was the woman there, to spy on *him?* Or was she, as she had represented herself to be, on the boat from Rotterdam, a German spy, also no doubt, placed there to watch him, to assure Herr Schwartz that he, Hoffman, was carrying out his instructions to the letter? The whole situation seemed fraught with danger. He turned to Patricia.

"But if you are right," he said, "and the woman is really a foreign spy, why should the Scotland Yard authorities want her to be in this house? Why not arrest her at once?"

"Because they may wish to watch her until she commits herself. She may only be suspected, so far."

Hoffman considered this aspect of the matter. For certain reasons it did not seem to him entirely logical. He felt sure that there was another and deeper reason for the woman's presence in Lord Brooke's house.

"In any event," he reassured Patricia, "I see no reason why you should be alarmed. The

Scotland Yard people know that the woman is here. She is here at their request. At least it is reasonable to suppose that they know what they are about."

"I know. But still I can't help being worried. Suppose the man who came to see Alan was n't a Scotland Yard man at all. Suppose he, too, was a spy."

"I don't think it at all likely that your brother would accept suggestions from anyone he did not know."

"You may be right. But Alan is dreadfully unsuspicious, and careless, too, at times. The police can't watch this woman all the time. There was that letter she posted, last night. They could n't have stopped that."

"They might. She was undoubtedly watched. The pillar-box in which she placed the letter could be opened, under proper authority, after she had returned to the house. And after all, what information could she hope to get here?"

"That 's just the point. As I have said, Alan is dreadfully careless. Take this morning, for instance. When I saw that woman in the hall, not far from Alan's study, I had a sort of feeling that she might have been in there, or at least on her way there, so I went in. Alan's desk is always a bit upset. On it—right on top, there was a piece of paper, with a memorandum

on it—something about a transport. Suppose that woman is a spy, and went in there and saw it." She rose and turned toward the door. "Come along with me and I 'll show you. I did n't dare disturb the desk, for Alan has given strict orders about that. Otherwise I should have taken the paper away. But I did lock the study door."

They reached it, as she finished speaking, and a moment later had entered the room.

"There," Patricia exclaimed. "Would you care to have a spy in the house, with a thing like *that* lying about?" She pointed to the paper of which she had spoken.

Hoffman looked at it. It was a single sheet of note-paper, and it had been laid carefully at the right hand side of the desk, under a paper-weight, which, however, covered only its upper edge, leaving the words upon it fully exposed. Hoffman read them. "Memo," they said. "To advise B about transport *Aspermoor* leaving Southampton day after tomorrow convoyed by two destroyers."

"You see," Patricia went on. "Things like that worry me dreadfully. I don't know what to do. Alan says he wants the woman here, and yet, I 'm afraid he does n't realize how careless he is. What would you advise? I wanted very much to ask you."

"I advise you to lay the whole matter before your brother," Hoffman said, as they made their way back to the library. "After all, he certainly must know what he is about."

Patricia sighed.

"I fancy there 's nothing else to do," she said. "But I mean to do a little spying myself, just the same."

"I don't think that I should bother, if I were you," Hoffman remarked, with a laugh. "You remember you said, the other day, that such work was utterly despicable. Better leave it to the police."

They said nothing more about the matter at this time. Patricia informed Hoffman that she was going to meet Lord and Lady Brooke at a Belgian Relief meeting at three o'clock, and asked Hoffman if he would not like to accompany her. The young man agreed at once. Just to be near Patricia was a great happiness. She left him in the library, and went upstairs to change her gown.

The door by which Patricia left the library opened to the main hall, and Hoffman watched her as she ascended the staircase, his face eager and smiling. How lovely she was! How happy it made him, to see her, to talk to her! He began to hope that the time might come, when he

would have the right to be with her always.

A sound behind him caused him to whirl about in sudden alarm. Someone had pronounced his name very softly. At first he did not see who it was, then, from the small writing-room which lay between the library and the morning-room appeared the slender figure of Mademoiselle Mercier, otherwise Gretchen Liebmann.

"You?" he exclaimed.

"Speak softly, please," the girl said, frowning, "or we may be overheard. I can stay but a moment."

"What do you want?" Hoffman muttered. "What are you doing here?"

The girl's eyes were fixed steadily on his.

"Did I not tell you, on the boat," she said, "that we were to work together?"

"I have not asked for any help."

"Nevertheless, those who are superior to you think that you may need it."

"How long have you been in there?" Hoffman asked.

The girl's smile was enigmatic.

"Long enough to hear about the message in Lord Brooke's study. I tried to get it, and failed. Did you succeed?"

"Yes. Which proves that I scarcely need your help."

"I 'm not so sure of that. Had I not made the attempt, I do not think you would have had the opportunity you did have. Where are you going, now?"

Hoffman flushed. The woman's questions began to annoy him. Yet something told him he had better answer her frankly.

"I am going to a meeting with Miss Brooke. Why?"

"Only this. So far you have done well. Do not let your interest in that young woman interfere with your duty. I am advising you for your own good."

Again Hoffman was sensible of a feeling of keen annoyance, which he felt it inadvisable to show.

"I shall attend to what I have to do in all good time," he replied. "When I have failed, you can reproach me. As a matter of fact, I hope to see Lord Brooke at the meeting to which I am going. The information I have needs some explanation."

"You mean to question him about it?" asked the woman, in astonishment.

"Certainly not. But I hope to find out what I wish, nevertheless." As he spoke, he heard the sound of footsteps upon the staircase. "Someone is coming," he said. "You had better go."

The woman slunk back through the curtained doorway behind her.

"Remember what I have said," she whispered.

Hoffman turned to meet Patricia with a feeling of greater uneasiness than he had felt since he left Antwerp. Undoubtedly this woman had been sent by Herr Schwartz to watch him. Why did the latter repose so little faith in him? And why were his efforts to be complicated, hampered indeed, by an assistant he did not want. Danger, even death, he realized, walked arm in arm with him. The English police knew of the woman's presence in the house. They even permitted, encouraged her presence. He must not imperil the work he had in hand by compromising himself with her. Matters were going along far too well for that.

At the relief meeting they found Alan Brooke and his wife just entering the door. While waiting, in their seats, for the addresses to begin, Patricia told her brother of her suspicions, and cautioned him particularly about the memorandum he had so carelessly left on his desk.

"I told Bob all about it," she said. "And I 've locked the study door. You 'd better be more careful in future."

Lord Brooke did not appear to be greatly disturbed.

"After all," he said, turning to Hoffman with a smile, "the memorandum did n't amount to much. We 've got a transport at Southampton that we 're bringing around to Bristol on Saturday. She 'll be in charge of a couple of destroyers. I don't imagine the news important enough for anyone to try to steal it. Patricia is right, though. I 'll have to be more careful about these things. Here 's the first speaker." He glanced toward the stage.

It was after five when the meeting was over. Patricia urged Hoffman to return with them, for tea, but he refused. He felt a strong desire to be alone—to think. Bidding them goodbye, he went for a long walk, and later dined at a chop-house in the Strand. It was nearly nine when he got back to his rooms, and the first thing he did, on entering, was to arrange the shades in such a way as to indicate that he had news to communicate. He then sat down, and began to read a book.

Ten minutes later, he heard a knock at the door. He threw it open, expecting, as before, to find the maid standing on the threshold. To his immense surprise, he was confronted by the slender figure of Mademoiselle Liebmann.

CHAPTER X

THE suspicions which Patricia Brooke entertained regarding the little French seamstress were in no degree lessened by her talk with Bob Hoffman. Even the incredulous attitude of her brother, Lord Brooke, did not serve to dissipate them. She felt certain that her intuitions were correct, that Bob Hoffman and her brother were both being badly taken in, and that even the police were at fault, unless, indeed, the man from Scotland Yard who had induced her brother to let the woman remain had not been from Scotland Yard at all. She made up her mind to do a little detective work on her own account, and if she discovered anything, to enjoy the satisfaction of lording it over the two self-satisfied males.

That evening she made it a point to explain matters to her sister-in-law.

"You know, Nelly," she said. "I feel it my duty to help Alan in this matter. Think what a terrible thing it would be, if any of the Admiralty secrets were really to get out—and through

Alan! It would ruin him. He might even be accused of being a traitor."

"Alan a traitor!" Lady Brooke exclaimed, horrified. "Pat! How can you say such things?"

"I didn't say he was a traitor. I said he might be accused of being one. And so he might. Did I hear you say that this Mercier girl asked for some money, this evening?"

"Yes. Just a few shillings. And she wanted permission to go out for a while, after dinner. Said she had some things to buy, at the chemist's."

"And you told her she could go?"

"Certainly. I do not expect her to do any sewing at night."

Patricia went to her room and began to dress for dinner. Instead of donning an evening gown, however, as she usually did, she put on a plain dress of dark blue silk, with high neck and long sleeves, and did not change her walking boots. Patricia had made up her mind to follow Miss Mercier, after dinner, and find out where she went.

The affair proved easier than she expected. As soon as the meal was over, she put on her hat and furs, and left the house. It was no unusual thing for her to do this, especially now, since the war had been going on. Her work in

connection with the relief and other patriotic associations to which she belonged frequently took her out in the evenings alone. She left in the tiny electric brougham that served her for getting about the city, and which she drove herself.

On this occasion, however, she did not drive it far. Two doors away there was a large house which she knew to be unoccupied. In the shadows before it, she turned, drew up, and began to wait for the seamstress to appear.

The wait was short. In a very few minutes the girl came through the servants' entrance at the side of the house and set off down the street. Patricia followed, rejoicing in the fact that Mademoiselle Mercier walked very rapidly and did not turn around. She hoped the girl would take a cab. It would make following her easier.

As Patricia passed the house, she was so intent upon the woman ahead of her that she failed to notice a slender, sallow-faced young man who detached himself from the shadow of a building across the way, and moved rapidly along in the direction taken by the Mercier woman. He, too, hoped that the latter would take a cab. He did not wish to be seen by Patricia.

Arriving at the corner, the seamstress paused. It was plain that she was looking for a convey-

ance. After a time a four-wheeler came along, and hailing it, she got in. The young man slipped across the street behind her, but he failed to reach the other side. Instead, he sprang to the rear of the vehicle, and climbed upon the axle. Patricia, coming along some hundred yards in the rear, did not perceive him, owing to his black suit, and the war-time darkness of the streets.

In this way the three continued for some twenty minutes, when Patricia saw the cab ahead draw up at a chemist's shop, in the neighborhood of Farrington Road. The woman at once got out, and entered the place. Patricia, nothing daunted, ranged herself across the street, and patiently waited. She would have liked to follow the girl into the shop, but it was not to be thought of. Mademoiselle Mercier would of course recognize her at once.

The interior of the place was brightly lighted, and through the plate glass windows Patricia saw that the girl purchased what appeared to be a bottle of toilet water, and some soap; at the same time she said a few words to the man who was waiting on her, but they had no extended conversation. The young fellow who had been perched behind the cab had clambered down, and was gazing nonchalantly through the window. Patricia saw him, but supposed him to

be merely a passerby. She began to feel ashamed of her suspicions of the girl. She had come out, it appeared, to make some purchases at a chemist's, just as she had said. There was a certain incongruity in her actions, however. Why had she taken a cab and driven to the Farrington Road. There were plenty of chemists' shops nearer at hand. She was a poor girl, according to her own story, in want. To spend the cost of cab hire, to come so far, when she might have walked to a shop close by, seemed uncalled-for extravagance.

In a little while the woman came out again, and greatly to Patricia's surprise, paid the cabman and dismissed him, instead of getting in. Then she walked rapidly in the direction of the Farrington Road.

Patricia followed, as did the young man who had been gazing in at the windows of the shop. The girl went along the Farrington Road for a short distance, then turned into a cross street.

It was dark, and there were few pedestrians about. Patricia drew her car up to the curb and got out. The seamstress was not more than a hundred feet ahead of her, walking at a swift pace. Scarcely had the young English girl begun to follow, when the woman ahead of her stopped, glanced quickly about, then entered a dimly lighted house.

Just what to do next, Patricia did not know. The woman had by now rung the door-bell and been admitted. Should she follow her within, demand to see her? Or should she await her re-appearance? She stood in doubt, uncertain which course to follow. It was clear, she concluded, that the work of an amateur detective presented serious difficulties.

She waited, undecided, for some little time. It was cold and dark. The inactivity annoyed her. With sudden determination she advanced quickly to the door of the house and rang the bell.

A rather dull-looking maid answered the summons. Patricia had already made up her mind what to say.

"A friend of mine, a young woman, just came in," she observed, in a voice of the utmost assurance. "I am to meet her here. You will please conduct me to her at once."

The maid seemed embarrassed. Her eyes met Patricia's uncertainly.

"But—miss—my lady," she stammered.

"It 's quite all right, my good girl. The lady is expecting me. Please take me to her at once. I am Patricia Brooke, Lord Brooke's sister."

Patricia's manner, no less than her concluding words, decided the matter. The girl

gasped, gave a curtsey, and turned to the stairs.

"This way, your ladyship," she mumbled, completely overcome, apparently, in the presence of one of the nobility.

Up the two flights of stairs Patricia toiled, wondering what on earth she was to say when she reached the top. After all, circumstances would have to decide. She pictured the supposed French seamstress as one of a desperate band of conspirators, and gasped. If she had only brought with her the little automatic pistol that lay upon her dressing-table. Then her courage returned. She was fighting for England—for her country. She would be no less brave than the men in the trenches.

The servant was by now rapping upon a door. Patricia stood close beside her, determined to enter as soon as it was opened. A moment later the door swung back, affording a view of a well-lighted room. Patricia stepped across the threshold, then gave a cry of amazement. In a chair beside the table sat Mademoiselle Mercier. At the door, holding it open, his face a picture of utter consternation, stood Bob Hoffman.

CHAPTER XI

BOB HOFFMAN, on his return to his rooms that night, had made the requisite signal by means of the window-shades of the bow window, with a feeling of regret. The adventure into which he had been so suddenly projected had begun to bore him. He wished himself well out of it. The affair seemed sordid, mean, and to his mind, without purpose. In spite of the reasons which had caused him to engage in the matter in the first place, he regretted ever having done so. As Patricia rightly said, the work of a spy was despicable.

His thoughts were rudely disturbed by the unexpected entrance of the woman who had accosted him on the Rotterdam boat, and had called herself Gretchen Liebmann. What had she come to his rooms for? Was it in response to the signals he had just made, or had she sought him out on her own initiative? The former supposition seemed scarcely tenable. The time had been far too short. Scarcely ten minutes had elapsed since he had arranged the

window shades. How could Miss Liebmann have been so quickly aware of the signal?

She came in, quite unconcerned, and took a chair. Hoffman stood regarding her curiously.

"What do you want here, miss?" he presently asked. His manner was by no means cordial.

The girl glanced at the bow window.

"You have signalled that you have news for us, have you not?"

"Yes." He nodded slowly. "I have. But how did you know that?"

The girl favored him with a cynical smile.

"The signal was observed—it was reported to me. As to how this was done, I do not see that it concerns you. You have been very slow, today, my friend? Herr Schwartz is accustomed to more instant obedience."

"I acted as I thought best," Hoffman replied, stiffly. "As I told you this afternoon, I wished to see Lord Brooke."

"You saw him?"

"I did."

"Then you have the information complete?"

"Yes."

"You are to give it to me."

"To you? Why?"

"Have I not come, in answer to the signal? Were not those your instructions?"

"How am I to know that you came in answer

to the signal? You might have just happened in?"

The girl turned to him with flashing eyes.

"My friend," she said. "From now on, please understand that I represent Herr Schwartz, here in London. You have been suspicious of me, from the start, as indeed we have been of you. The time for all that is ended. Reflect a moment. I address myself to you on the Rotterdam boat. I know all your plans. I arrange to become seamstress at Lord Brooke's, in order to be on hand to assist you. I know your address here. I know the signals, confided to you by Herr Schwartz. If you want final proof, here it is." She laid on the table before him a sheet of paper, containing a photographic reproduction of a thumb-print. "Compare this with the original. You may remember that you gave the impression to Herr Schwartz, in Antwerp."

Hoffman quickly compared the photograph which the girl handed him with his own thumb. The lines were identical He handed the slip of paper back to her.

"I am satisfied," he said.

"Good. You see that I trust you fully, otherwise I would not put myself in your hands. If you were inclined to treachery, you would only have to denounce me to the police, and I should

be instantly arrested. Of course,"—she paused, with a hard smile—"that would cost you your life, for be assured, the arm of Herr Schwartz is a long one—and his memory is no less long. Now that we fully understand each other, kindly let me have the information you secured today."

"By all means. But I 'm afraid it is n't very important. The transport *Aspermoor* leaves Southampton day after tomorrow, conveyed by two destroyers."

The girl's eyes gleamed. She took a gold pencil from her pocketbook, and wrote a few words upon a card within it.

"Not very important!" she exclaimed. "My friend, it is invaluable. In spite of all our efforts, we have been unable to gain any advance information regarding the English transport service to France. Our submarines have been blind. They have not yet succeeded in sinking a single troop-ship. Think what it will mean, to send a whole regiment to the bottom!"

Hoffman thought. The idea filled him with horror. For an instant he was tempted to take the woman by her slender neck and strangle her. What was her life, compared with that of thousands? Despicable work, indeed. Then the knowledge of a great, though to him inexplicable purpose, rose in his mind. The interview he

had had with the man with the piercing grey eyes, just before his journey to Rotterdam, recurred to him with irresistible force. He had been told to obey, blindly, implicitly, trusting to intelligences superior to his own. Even the sinking of a transport, horrifying as it might seem to him, was as nothing, compared with success in what he had undertaken. He composed his features, hoping that his companion had not observed his momentary weakness.

She, however, was far too much occupied with her own thoughts, to pay attention to him. An almost satanic joy shone in her eyes.

"Two days," she repeated to herself. "There will be time. The news will be in Antwerp before midnight. My friend, within forty-eight hours the transport *Aspermoor* will be at the bottom of the English Channel."

"Then you think Herr Schwartz will be satisfied?" Hoffman asked.

"He will be delighted. If you play your cards well, you can make your fortune. This Lord Brooke is a fool. Almost too great a fool, at times. One is apt to be suspicious of information so freely given. But in forty-eight hours we shall know."

"Lord Brooke is certainly not a fool," Hoffman remarked gloomily. "He trusts me, that is all. Do not forget that I am his wife's

brother. To him the idea of treachery on my part would be unthinkable."

"Yes—yes. That is true. See that you preserve his confidence. It is invaluable to us. And for that reason, I am fearful of the interest you show in that girl, his sister. Are you in love with her, my friend?"

"I do not see what my private affairs have to do with the matter."

"Everything. If you really love the sister, you will not be so ready to disgrace the brother. In fact, I cannot reconcile such a feeling on your part with the work you have undertaken. I have felt it my duty to report the affair to Herr Schwartz."

Hoffman regarded the woman with a cynical smile.

"Has it not occurred to you, my friend," he said, "that only by pretending a strong feeling for Lord Brooke's sister can I visit his house almost daily? Would not such visits appear highly suspicious, were I to make them merely to call on my sister? It seems to me that, with all your experience in work of this sort, you still have a great deal to learn."

His criticisms did not seem to anger Miss Liebmann in the least. On the contrary, she regarded him with undisguised admiration.

"You are splendid!" she exclaimed. "It was

stupid of me not to have guessed your reasons." A momentary look of tenderness came into her eyes. "For what you have just told me I am doubly grateful. You and I, my friend, should know each other better. We have our work in common. It is possible we might have—something more."

Her words, accompanied by a look of invitation, her sudden change of manner, left Hoffman in no doubt as to her meaning. Quite suddenly he realized the girl's beauty. He placed his hand tenderly over hers.

"Why not?" he whispered.

It was then that the maid accompanying Patricia Brooke rapped upon the door.

"See who it is?" the Liebmann girl whispered in a voice of terror. "And remember, if anything happens to prevent me from leaving here with that message, you will repeat the signal, and deliver it yourself."

Hoffman nodded, and threw open the door.

The amazement he saw upon Patricia's face was doubly reflected in his own. Why had she come here? How was he to explain Miss Liebmann's presence? The only plausible explanation, an affair of the heart with the attractive seamstress, was not to be thought of. He cared far too deeply for Patricia for that. Yet the real explanation of the woman's visit to his

rooms was equally a matter of which he could not speak. He stood, his face grey, staring at Patricia in silence.

The latter was herself as little able to speak. She knew Hoffman's address, but in the eagerness of her pursuit of the woman, she had not observed the exact location of the street in which she now was. Hoffman had been furthest from her thoughts. To find the woman with *him* was as unexpected as it would have been to find herself in the moon. If Mademoiselle Mercier was a foreign spy, was the young American her confederate? The whole thing seemed grotesque, absurd.

"Patricia," Hoffman gasped. "Won't you come in?"

Patricia Brooke made a quick decision. To admit, before the young seamstress, that she had been following her, was out of the question. To admit, on the other hand, that she was visiting Hoffman at his rooms, was no less so. With an effort, she summoned up her courage, and smiled.

"Alan and I were on our way to supper," she said. "We stopped, thinking you might like to join us. I came up, because he did not wish to leave Nelly and me alone in the car. But,"—she glanced at his companion—"I am afraid you are otherwise engaged."

Miss Liebmann spoke up at once. Her manner was deferential, calm.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon. Mr. Hoffman will not remain on *my* account. I came here to ask of him a great favor. He has been good enough to say that he will do for me what he can."

"A favor?" Patricia looked from Hoffman to his companion.

"Yes," the girl went on, easily. "I have in America an uncle. I do not know his address, but last year he was *maître de hôtel* at a great place on the Broadway—the name I cannot remember, but that of the proprietaire I know. It is Astor, I think. Such a name. I have come to Monsieur Hoffman to ask the great favor that he will communicate with his friends in America, and perhaps find for me my uncle, Henri Mercier."

Hoffman listened to this calm recital in amazement. His companion was resourceful, to say the least.

"Mademoiselle Mercier has told you the truth," he said quietly. "I have promised to assist her in any way that I can. From what she tells me, I think her uncle may be found at the Hotel Astor, in New York, or, possibly, at the Waldorf."

His manner was frank, his embarrassment

gone. Patricia felt inclined to believe him. Mademoiselle Mercier moved toward the door.

"I will, then, bid you good evening, Monsieur Hoffman," she said. "And permit me to thank you, for your so great kindness, to help a poor Frenchwoman who is without friends."

Hoffman bowed. He felt that a difficult situation had been successfully met, and moved to one side, in order that Miss Liebmann might leave the room. As he did so, a new figure appeared in the door. It was a slim, dark young man, with a sallow face. He glanced with interest at the scene before him.

Miss Liebmann recoiled, with an involuntary shudder. Patricia seemed unable to speak. Hoffman, stepping forward, addressed the new arrival in a steady voice, although his nerves were on edge.

"Whom do you wish to see?" he asked.

"Robert Hoffman. Is that your name?"

"Yes." Hoffman felt a shaking sensation in the knees.

"I think I had better go," Patricia exclaimed, turning to the door.

The man stood respectfully aside.

"It would be better, miss," he said.

"Good-night, Bob," Patricia said, giving Hoffman her hand. "Come and see me tomorrow. I want to talk to you."

"Thank you, Patricia. I will." In a moment she had gone.

Miss Liebmann in turn moved toward the door.

"I think I had better go, too, monsieur," she said.

The sallow young man, however, apparently thought otherwise. He quietly closed the door.

"Wait a moment, miss," he said. "My business is with you, as well. Please explain to me why you came here to see Mr. Hoffman."

"I came to ask him to help me find my uncle, who lives in America."

The young man smiled.

"The excuse is a poor one," he said. "I do not believe it. You are looked upon by the police as a suspicious character. I am inclined to think that I had better place you under arrest."

The girl gave Hoffman a quick and eloquent glance, full of subtle appeal.

"Mr. Hoffman can vouch for the truth of what I say," she exclaimed.

The young man did not appear to be greatly impressed.

"We know nothing of Mr. Hoffman," he said, "except that he is an American war correspondent. If I arrest you, I shall consider it my duty to arrest him as well. He may be working with you."

His words affected Hoffman peculiarly. He stood for a moment in silence. Then he went up to the man, who stood between the door and the window, and spoke.

"I am an American," he said, "and Lord Brooke's brother-in-law. He can vouch for my honesty. This lady came to see me on a personal matter. I demand that you leave my rooms at once."

The man laughed. His eyes were fixed on Mademoiselle Liebmann. It was perfectly evident that he was watching her every movement.

"That may all be true," he said. "You can send for Lord Brooke, and he can explain matters. But while we 're waiting, I mean to take both of you to Scotland Yard. You can tell your story to my superiors."

Hoffman started. The man's words filled him with dismay. He knew that his companion had made a memorandum of the message he had given her, on a card in her purse. If she were to be searched, the message would be found. Furthermore, she had planned to have that message on its way to Antwerp before midnight. Any delay now might upset her plans. The message, he knew, must be delivered at all costs.

The man before him had not taken his eyes from Miss Liebmann. Suddenly he saw her

make a quick motion with her pocketbook, as though to cast it from her.

"Here—give me that purse," he cried, harshly, and made a step toward her.

Hoffman acted instantly. Extending his right foot, so as to bring it across the line of the other man's progress, he gave him a quick push that sent him sprawling. At the same time he called sharply to Miss Liebmann.

"Now 's your chance—quick!" he cried.

The woman needed no further warning. Already she was halfway to the door. By the time the fallen man had scrambled to his feet, she had disappeared down the stairs. Hoffman promptly turned and locked the door after her.

His opponent drew a revolver and pointed it at him.

"Open that door!" he said.

Hoffman obeyed at once. As he did so, the sound of the street door, slamming, came up to them from below.

The man with the revolver evidently realized the uselessness of pursuit.

"I 'll take you along, anyway," he said, and pointed down the stairs.

CHAPTER XII

IN spite of the hasty excuse given by Patricia to Bob Hoffman for her sudden appearance at his rooms, Lord Brooke was not below, in his motor car, but quietly reading in his library at home. It was here that Patricia burst in upon him, full of the adventures of the evening.

As she told her story, her brother's brow began to cloud. He seemed very much disturbed.

"How could you ever have done such a foolish thing, Pat?" he asked, and began striding up and down the room.

"I don't think it was foolish. The woman might have been a spy. In fact, the man who came in just as I left seemed to be of the same opinion as I was."

"You left him there?"

"Yes."

"And the seamstress as well?"

"Yes. She tried to go, but the fellow would n't let her. From the way he acted I rather think he must have been a special officer of some sort, possibly from Scotland Yard."

"Good God!" Lord Brooke exclaimed. "I 'll have to look into this. It would never do to have Bob locked up." The thought seemed to fill him with dismay.

"Why should they lock Bob up?" Patricia asked. "Of course there may be something suspicious about the woman's actions but certainly they would n't suspect *him.*"

"Why not, if he were found there with her? It 's the very first thing they would do. There 's no doubt about it; I 'll have to look into this." He rang for one of his servants and ordered his car.

Some twenty minutes later he drew up before the doorway of a magnificent building on the Embankment, and after giving a few rapid orders to his chauffeur, went inside. Some words scribbled on a card quickly secured him an audience with a middle-aged, grey-moustached man, who received him with the greatest consideration, and indicated a chair.

"I 'm afraid you locked up my brother-in-law, Austen," Lord Brooke remarked. "That won't do at all, you know."

The man opposite him glanced at a slip of paper which lay before him.

"A stupid blunder," he said, "and yet, I can't blame my man at all."

"How did it happen?"

"Very simply. One of our inspectors was detailed to watch your house, on account of that new seamstress Lady Brooke has engaged."

"Precisely. But surely he was instructed not to arrest her—merely to keep her under constant observation."

"Yes. That is true. Tonight the woman went out, stopped at a shop, then went to Mr. Hoffman's rooms. Unfortunately, your sister undertook to conduct an investigation on her own account, and followed the woman to Mr. Hoffman's apartment. Our man considered it wise to go up and see that nothing out of the way occurred."

"He should not have done so."

"So I told him. A slight error in judgment. But to resume. As soon as your sister left, the inspector began to question Mr. Hoffman and the woman. He could n't well do less, you see, after having entered the place. While he was doing so, Mr. Hoffman, who seems to be rather a hot-headed young man, suddenly tripped the inspector up, and called to the woman to escape, which she did. After that, of course, there was nothing to do but bring him here. The majesty of the law must be upheld, you know."

"Just so. Had n't you better send for him?"

"By all means." He spoke a few words

through his desk telephone. "You can take him along with you."

"And what about the woman?"

"We 'll find her again, before long. I fancy she will not return to your house, but I feel sure she will communicate with Mr. Hoffman within the next day or two. Naturally, we will keep him under observation at all times. Ah!"—he turned as Bob Hoffman entered the room, in the care of a constable. He did not seem at all cast down.

"Hello, Alan!" he exclaimed. "You got here rather more quickly than I expected. How did you know?"

"Patricia told me enough to make me suspect trouble. Why will you persist in carrying on love affairs with attractive young seamstresses from Paris?" He laughed heartily. "And above all, why assault an officer of the law? That is rather more serious, young man. I have done my best with Mr. Austen here, but I don't know whether he means to let you go or not. If he does, it will be solely because of his extreme good nature."

Hoffman bowed to the grey-moustached man at the desk.

"I assure you, sir," he said, very quietly, "that I acted from the best of motives."

"No doubt, sir, no doubt. To succor young ladies in distress is doubtless a commendable action. But still, you have resisted an officer of the law in the performance of his duty and that is a decidedly serious matter. As it turns out, however, no great harm has been done, and therefore, I have decided to release you in the custody of our friend, Lord Brooke, who has undertaken to be responsible for your future conduct."

Again Hoffman bowed.

"I am deeply grateful to you, sir, for your kindness," he said, "and I assure you I shall do my best to justify it. I am sure you will see that for the young woman to have been placed under arrest while in my rooms would have been a serious blow to her reputation."

"It was on that account, then, that you acted as you did?"

"Certainly. The woman had committed no crime."

"I see. Well, Mr. Hoffman, let this be a lesson to you, and in the future try to handle your affairs of the heart with more discretion. Good-day."

"Good-day, sir." Hoffman followed Lord Brooke to the waiting motor car.

When they had taken their seats and were

headed for Exmouth Street, Hoffman turned to his brother-in-law.

"Why is that young woman being followed by the police?" he asked.

"Because, my dear fellow, she is suspected of being a spy."

"Then why, may I ask, did you permit Nelly to engage her as seamstress?"

"Simply in order that she might incriminate herself—and others. By giving her sufficient rope, we hoped that she might hang herself."

"I see." Hoffman considered Lord Brooke's reply for a long time in silence.

"Am I being watched also?" he asked at length.

"My dear fellow, why should the police be interested in you? Is your conscience troubling you?"

"No. Not that. But since the woman came to see me at my rooms, they might conclude—"

"They have already concluded that Mademoiselle Mercier is young and good-looking. Extremely good-looking. Your taste, my dear chap, is excellent."

Hoffman remained silent. Somehow he felt that Lord Brooke was not being frank with him. Yet he could not for a moment believe that his brother-in-law distrusted him, else why did he

so freely confide in him, in matters of such vital importance. The intangible web that had enmeshed him, since his return from Rotterdam, seemed to be drawing tighter and tighter. He felt that his every move disturbed some thread, communicated some intelligence to the secret powers that for the time being governed his life. Yet there was nothing for him to do but go ahead, with supreme confidence in the ultimate good of his work.

When they arrived at Exmouth Street the hour was very late. Hoffman took leave of his companion at once, and ascended to his rooms. The place seemed just as he had left it. He closed and locked the door, and throwing himself into a chair, lighted his pipe, and proceeded to review mentally the events of the day.

He had scarcely seated himself when he heard a sound from the bedroom adjoining, and a moment later a voice, low and distinct, came through the curtained doorway.

"Please lower the shades," it said.

Hoffman sprang to his feet in astonishment. The voice was entirely familiar to him. It was that of Mademoiselle Liebmann. He stared at the bedroom door in bewilderment.

"You must lower the shades at once," the voice repeated.

Hoffman did as he was told, thus preventing

anyone from observing from outside the interior of the room. As soon as the shades were drawn, Miss Liebmann came through the curtains before the bedroom door.

"What are you doing here?" Hoffman asked. "I thought you had left the house."

"I *did* leave it, but only to go to a chemist's shop in the next street. Then I came back. I thought I would be safer here than anywhere else in London."

"I don't understand," Hoffman said, vaguely.

"I will explain everything to you quite frankly, for I know, after what occurred tonight, that you are heart and soul with our cause. There is a building in the next street, in which there is a chemist's shop, kept by one of our people. His wife, an invalid, occupies a room on the third floor, from the windows of which she is able to keep a constant watch upon the windows of this room. As soon as your signals were made, she reported the fact to her husband, and arrangements were made to communicate with you. Last night, acting under instructions from headquarters, I wrote this man a letter, telling him that, if you signalled tonight, I would reply to the signal. I stopped there, on my way to your rooms this evening, to ascertain whether you had expressed a desire to communicate with us, and on learning

that you had, I came and received your message. By your prompt action in tripping up the policeman I was able to escape, and give the message to our friend, the chemist, who, himself, undertook to see that it was forwarded at once. It is undoubtedly in the hands of Herr Schwartz, by now."

"But—why did you return here!"

"Where else could I go? The police are on my track. To return to Lord Brooke's house would have been to play into their hands. And, now that you have demonstrated beyond question your fidelity to our cause, my presence there is no longer necessary. I decided that here, in your rooms, would be the last place in which the police would expect to find me tonight. I came back at once."

"And—do you expect to stay here the rest of the night?"

"Certainly. When I came, I fully expected to be alone. I had no idea that you would be able to secure your freedom so quickly. How did you manage to do it?"

"Easily enough. I sent for Lord Brooke. I implied that you had come here because of an *amour* between us. I explained my attack upon the policeman, on the grounds that I could not compromise your reputation by having you arrested here in my rooms. Lord Brooke's in-

fluence was sufficient to insure my release."

"Lord Brooke suspects nothing, then?"

"Not so far as I am concerned. But you, it appears, are under suspicion."

"I fully expected that, but it makes no difference. I am not needed in the matter any further, at least at present. But one thing I must tell you. Do not attempt to communicate in future by means of the window-shade signals."

"Why not?"

"Because it would not be safe. The man who followed me tonight must have seen me enter the chemist's shop. He will not believe that I went there merely to buy a bottle of toilet water. The place will be watched from now on. I have advised our friends there to keep very quiet."

"Then how am I to communicate?"

"I do not know. I instructed our people to transmit to Herr Schwartz, in addition to the message about the transport, a full account of the events of the evening. I rather suspect that you will receive new orders from him."

"How?"

"I cannot say. He has methods of his own. But you will hear from him—of that I am sure."

"Then there is nothing more we can do tonight?"

"Nothing. Not so far as our work is concerned, at least." She came up to Hoffman

and put her hand on his arm. "I think you are splendid. When you tripped that constable up, I—my heart went out to you. I am glad that the only place of safety for me in London to-night was with you." She looked up into Hoffman's eyes, with an expression of sincere admiration.

"I—I, too, am glad," he stammered, thinking of Patricia. Then he motioned to the curtained doorway leading to the bedroom.

"You 'd better turn in, had n't you? It 's fearfully late. I 'll make myself comfortable in this chair."

The girl looked at him with darkening eyes.

"In this chair?" she questioned, her voice, her manner indicating her disappointment.

"Yes. I trust you will be comfortable. Good-night." He threw himself into the chair, and took up his pipe.

"Good-night." The girl went, almost reluctantly, to the bedroom door. Hoffman could feel her eager eyes upon him, but he did not turn. Before him rose the figure of Patricia, the woman he loved. He set his teeth resolutely upon the amber stem of his pipe.

CHAPTER XIII

BOB HOFFMAN did not sleep very well, in the chair, in his sitting-room. A confused tangle of dreams filled his mind. He thought that he had been arrested, that Herr Schwartz was condemning him to be placed on the deck of a transport loaded with British troops, that a submarine arrived quite suddenly and sank the transport leaving him struggling in the waves, trying to support the figure of Patricia, who appeared in the water at his side. He tossed restlessly about during the remainder of the night, and at dawn, was again smoking his pipe, and wondering whether Miss Liebmann, in the adjoining room, was asleep or awake.

She settled this question very shortly by appearing through the bedroom doorway, fully dressed, and wearing her hat and furs. Her manner was cold, distant, showing none of the cordiality she had exhibited the evening before.

"Good-morning," Hoffman said, rather lamely. He knew the reason for the girl's coldness

and the adage of the "woman scorned" flashed through his mind.

"Good-morning," the girl said, in a dull voice.

"Are you going?"

"Yes."

"But—I hoped you would stay—for breakfast."

"Impossible. I must leave here before anyone is up. Even now, I do not know that I can get away without being seen."

"Where are you going?" Hoffman asked.

"I have friends who will take care of me."

"Shall I not see you again?"

"I do not know. It will depend upon what orders are given by Herr Schwartz. You will hear from him before long."

"Can I not communicate with you?"

"What for, unless it is ordered by Herr Schwartz?" Her words were in the nature of a challenge, and Hoffman refused to take it up.

"Very well," he said. "I will wait to hear from him."

"Good-bye." The girl went to the door, her eyes, very large and inviting, fixed on Hoffman's face.

"Good-bye," he muttered, going up to her. "If you want to see me, let me know here."

The girl gave a hard laugh, and opened the door.

"We shall meet again, Mr. Hoffman," she said. "Until then, *au revoir.*" In a moment she was gone.

Hoffman put down his pipe with a growl of dissatisfaction. He realized fully that the woman had made definite advances to him, which he had rejected. She would hate him for that. He hoped sincerely that her hatred would not interfere in any way with the work he was called upon to do.

After his breakfast had been brought, and eaten, he made up his mind to go and see Patricia. He felt that he wanted to talk to her, after the events of the evening. He wondered whether Lord Brooke would feel called upon to tell his sister the reason which the police had assigned, to account for the visit of the Liebmann woman to his rooms. The thought that Patricia might believe him guilty of a cheap and sordid affair with the little seamstress annoyed him beyond measure.

There was much time to kill, before he could present himself at Lord Brooke's. To appear at eight o'clock in the morning was quite out of the question. He sat down, and occupied himself with the morning paper.

Toward nine o'clock, the maid brought him some letters which the postman had just left. There were three, two of which were from ac-

quaintances in America. The third proved to be more interesting.

It was written on cheap paper, and the envelope was addressed in a vague and uncertain handwriting, and postmarked at London, late the night before.

There were only a few words on the single sheet which the envelope contained.

"Mr. S. at Antwerp desires to see you at once," the message read.

Hoffman slowly tore the letter into bits, and threw them into the fireplace. Then, for greater security, he struck a match and set fire to the fragments. In a few moments they had disappeared in smoke.

So Herr Schwartz desired to see him. He wondered why. The information regarding the transport had pleased him, perhaps. Hoffman decided to set out at once.

First, however, he determined to see Patricia, and as the hour was now half after nine he put on his coat and made his way to the street.

Patricia received him in the library. She was alone, and Hoffman thought her manner somewhat distant. He wondered what Lord Brooke had told her regarding the events of the evening before.

"How do you do, Patricia," he said, extending his hand.

The girl took it, but her smile was not as spontaneous as usual.

"How are you, Bob," she said. "Alan tells me you had rather an unpleasant experience last night."

"Yes, I was arrested. I wonder what has become of that Mercier woman. Did she return here?"

"No. We have n't seen anything of her. It appears that she was a spy, just as I thought. I 'm glad she 's gone. There 's no knowing what she might have found out had she remained here. Have you seen her?"

"Why should I? I hope you don't think, Patricia, that I had any interest in the girl?"

"No. I don't think anything about it. You have a perfect right to feel interested in her, if you wish. She is very pretty."

"Patricia! Please don't talk like that. How could a girl like that mean anything to me? She came, so she said, to ask my help in finding her uncle."

"Do you think that was her real reason?"

"I don't know. She had only been at my place a few moments when you came."

"Well, Bob. I confess I don't understand it at all. I think the story of her uncle was made out of whole cloth. She must have had some other reason for coming to you."

"Then I don't know what it was. Let 's change the subject. The woman has disappeared, and I don't suppose we will either of us see her again. By the way, I 'm leaving for Rotterdam today."

"Rotterdam?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"I 'm going to make another try to get into Belgium or Germany. I have a friend over there who may be able to help me."

"Then you—you may not come back—very soon?"

"I can't say. If I succeed, I may be gone a long time. If I fail, I may return at once, as I did before. It 's all a chance."

"Well, Bob, I wish you success, I 'm sure."

Hoffman went up to the girl and took her hand.

"Patricia," he said, "before I go I want to tell you something that I think you should know. Of all the women I have ever met in my life, you are the only one whose good opinion has really meant anything to me. If I thought that I should never see you again, I should n't care about living at all. I love you, Patricia. I know how you feel about this war, and all that, and how your time is taken up with other things, but I want you to know, in case anything should

happen, that I love you with all my heart—with all my soul. No,"—he raised his hand as she began to speak—"I don't want you to answer me, now. When I come back—when the work I am trying to do is done—I shall tell you again what I have told you today, and ask you to marry me, too. But for the present, I ask you nothing—not even to tell me whether or not you care. But I just wanted you to know."

Patricia stood, quite still, listening in surprise to his words. She tried twice to speak, but did not seem able to find the words she wanted. At last she put out her hand.

"I am not sorry for what you have told me, Bob," she said. "When you are ready to say more, come to me, and—and I—" She hesitated, faltered, grew very red, and turned away.

Hoffman took her hand, and raising it to his lips, covered it with kisses.

"Thank you, Pat—thank you. I will come, some time. There are things, now, which even to you I cannot explain. But promise me this. No matter what you may hear about me, no matter how black things may look, don't condemn me, until you have heard both sides."

The girl looked at him in wonder.

"Both sides of what?" she exclaimed. "What could I possibly hear about you, that was not fine and good? I don't understand you, Bob."

"I know. And I can't explain. But remember what I tell you, and now, I 'll say good-bye."

"Good-bye, Bob. And good luck. I hope we shall see you very soon."

"I hope so too, Pat. Good-bye." He turned, and without saying anything more, left the room.

He returned at once to Exmouth Street, and began to make the few preparations necessary for his journey. He had about completed them when the maid came to his rooms and informed him that a gentleman was below, and wished to see him. He did not give any name. Hoffman told the girl to send him up.

While he was speculating as to who his visitor might be, there came a knock on the door. Hoffman, opening it, gave an exclamation of surprise. The man who stood before him, short, bronzed, heavily built, was the one who had given him those memorable instructions, some ten days before, that had resulted in his going to Rotterdam.

The new arrival closed the door carefully after him, and extended his hand.

"How are you, Mr. Hoffman?" he said.

"Very well. Won't you sit down?"

The man sank into a chair. His piercing grey eyes took in the contents of the room.

"I see you are going away," he said, eyeing Hoffman's newly packed suitcase. "Where to, may I ask?"

"To Rotterdam and Antwerp."

"Why?"

"Herr Schwartz has sent for me."

"Indeed! I trust he is not displeased with your work."

"On the contrary, I am informed that he is delighted. I sent forward some news about a transport, last night—"

"Oh—you got that, did you?" the man interrupted.

"Yes. I rather think that I have been sent for to receive congratulations, and perhaps some new instructions. The existing arrangements were somewhat upset, by the action of the police, last night. You knew that I was arrested?"

"Yes. It was most unfortunate, but I think no harm will come of it. We have your brother-in-law to thank for that. By the way—have you seen anything of your—assistant?"

"Yes. She was here this morning. In fact, she spent the night here."

The older man laughed heartily.

"Good. We looked for her everywhere. She showed excellent judgment. Did she say where she was going?"

"No. But I imagine she will communicate with me."

"No doubt. She is one of Herr Schwartz's best agents. He will not fail to use her. By the way, you can say to Schwartz that you expect to have some tremendously important news, in a few days—news that may result in a brilliant victory for the squadron off the Falkland Islands."

"Really? And how will I get this information?"

"Oh—in the same way as before. Lord Brooke will talk too much, as usual. Or leave some papers lying about. He 's a very careless man."

"H—m." Hoffman's lips drew into a thin straight line. "That 's the part I don't like."

"Well—it can't be helped—for the present, at least. Later on, we 'll see. How were you treated, in Antwerp, on your last visit?"

"I was locked up for six days, under sentence of death, in case the news I brought regarding Admiral Sturdee's departure turned out to be untrue. Luckily, it did n't."

The man in the chair rose.

"Well—I just dropped in to see that everything was all right. I heard about your arrest last night, and it worried me. But you did

quite right in effecting the woman's escape. She had the message, I suppose."

"Yes. And was charged with getting it to Antwerp. I could n't afford to take any chances."

"Quite right. Well, I 'm glad everything is going so well. Get back as soon as possible, and go on as before. When I want you, I 'll send for you. Good-day."

"Good-day." Hoffman bowed his visitor out. A little later he took the boat train for Harwich.

The journey across the channel was entirely uneventful. Arriving as he did, late in the evening, he was obliged to postpone his visit to the German consul until the following day. When, after a hearty breakfast, he saw the gentleman, his reception was far more cordial than it had been on the occasion of his previous visit. He was ushered into the consul's presence without the formality of waiting, and received with enthusiasm.

"You wish to go straight on to Antwerp, not so?" the latter asked, when they were seated.

"Yes. I am expected."

"Just so. Herr Schwartz has sent me word. How are things in England?"

"Very quiet. The English do not seem to realize that they are at war."

"They will realize it before long, the scoundrels. When it is too late. Here—this is your passport." He passed the document over to Hoffman. "May I offer you a glass of schnapps?"

"No, thank you. A little too early in the day for me. When is the next train?"

"Not until noon, I think. The schedule is somewhat irregular, but you can get the necessary information at the railway station."

Hoffman bade the consul good-day, and, satchel in hand, made his way to the depot. Here he was informed that he would not be able to leave for Antwerp until one o'clock. He accordingly spent the intervening time in looking about the city.

Early in the afternoon he reached Antwerp, and, as before, sought an interview with the Military Governor. Here, as in Rotterdam, he was very favorably received. The governor informed him that Herr Schwartz was away, and would not return for several hours. He had left word, however, that Mr. Hoffman was to meet him at six.

"But," Hoffman objected, "where am I to meet him? Although I have been to his house, I do not know where it is."

The governor allowed a faint smile to light up his grim face.

"Our friend Schwartz has no permanent address," he said. "You will come here; at the hour named, Herr Schwartz's secretary will be waiting for you. Good-afternoon."

Hoffman left his satchel at a nearby hotel, and proceeded to make an examination of the shell-torn city For the first time since his departure from America, he had an opportunity to see some of the actual effects of the war.

CHAPTER XIV

HOFFMAN'S second interview with Herr Schwartz, the German secret service agent, took place in a small room, a sort of study, in a house not far from the Hôtel de Ville. The agent's secretary, the young man whom he addressed as "Carl," and who had seen Hoffman to the train on the occasion of his first visit, met him in the anteroom of the Military Governor's offices, at six o'clock; he greeted Hoffman pleasantly, in excellent English, and together they proceeded to the street.

The short walk to the house was made in silence. Hoffman found himself wondering whether Herr Schwartz occupied a different house each day. He had heard, from some source or other, that such individuals were wont to appear in many different personalities, and to change their habitats with amazing frequency, in order that enemy spies might never be able to locate them.

The entrance to the house was made by means

of a narrow passageway, leading to a small court. From the court, they passed to a long corridor with a number of twists and turns in it. When they finally reached the door of the secret agent's study, Hoffman was quite unable to tell whether they were in the building facing on the street from which they had entered, or another, on an entirely different street. The man he sought hid himself away like a mole, safe from all intrusion.

When, in response to the secretary's knocks, the door swung slowly open, Hoffman glanced eagerly inside the room. At a small desk, beneath a green-shaded electric lamp, sat the man he sought. At first, however, Hoffman did not recognize him. Instead of the sombre black of their former meeting, he wore a checked grey suit, with a colored shirt and brilliant necktie, and looked like a prosperous and sportily inclined commercial traveller. The fur-lined overcoat and green velour hat on a chair near the desk, the small leather satchel beside it, indicated that he had just returned from a journey of some sort. He flicked the ashes from his cigar, nodded to the secretary, who at once withdrew, and pointed to a chair. Hoffman sat down.

"Well, my friend," he said, in a brisk voice. "You arrive promptly."

Hoffman nodded.

"I was informed that you desired to see me at once," he said.

"Precisely. I am glad to see you. I have an important commission with which I have decided to entrust you"

"Yes? Then I judge that you are satisfied with my work, so far."

Herr Schwartz drummed lightly on the table with his finger nails. Hoffman observed that they were exquisitely manicured.

"You have done well—yes," he said. "And yet, your information has not been of very great value."

"Not of great value? The news about the Falkland Islands? The transport?"

"The transport, it appears, was empty," Herr Schwartz replied gloomily. "Our U-47 sank her, early today. There were, unfortunately, no lives lost. The crew took to the boats. The destroyers escaped. The loss of the vessel inflicts a certain small damage upon the enemy, it is true, but it was not what we had expected."

"I could not know that the vessel was in ballast," Hoffman objected. "I gave the information as I secured it."

"It is just there, my friend, that your work is at fault. It has invariably been correct, but

it has not been complete. Had you been able to inform us that the transport carried no troops we would not have risked our U-boat to so little purpose. She was fired on by the destroyers, and narrowly escaped being sunk."

"But," Hoffman explained, "I have not considered it wise to question Lord Brooke. I have, as I told you during our first interview, feared to arouse his suspicions."

"Your idea is an excellent one, of course, but still I think that a few judicious questions might have safely been put. Suppose, for instance, you had asked, in an off-hand way, how many men the *Aspermoor* carried. You could have brought such a question about very readily, by expressing amazement that such a large number of troops could be moved to the Continent in comparative safety. I do not presume to indicate the exact conversation, but I still believe that you could, by adroit questioning, get possession of more detailed facts. You see my point?"

"Yes." Hoffman nodded. "I see what you mean. And in future I will try to do better."

"You must not only try. You must succeed. And that brings me to the special task I now wish you to undertake."

"What is it?"

"This. You have informed us that the

British squadron under Admiral Sturdee has gone to the Falkland Islands. We believe that information to be correct. We know the speed of the vessels in this squadron, and we are able to tell, almost to a day, when they will arrive at Port William and join the battleship *Canopus*. Your information that the fortifications at that place are unimportant was, of course, well known to us in advance. We believe from what you tell us that the supply of coal at the islands is entirely insufficient for the needs of so large a squadron. The distance from Portsmouth to the islands, the fact that the English vessels will make a forced run, with high consumption of fuel, in order to reach their destination before von Spee can do so, indicates that they will arrive with practically empty bunkers. As you have already informed us, cargoes of coal have been dispatched from South American ports to replenish the supply at the Falklands. That, I understand is the situation?"

"Exactly," Hoffman replied. "What of it?"

"This. Our squadron will round the Horn in ample time to reach the Falkland Islands before the English can arrive there. But we do not dare risk a meeting with the English ships, because they are far more powerful, and we should be defeated. On one condition only will

von Spee be ordered to the Falkland Islands." He paused, regarding Hoffman keenly.

"What condition?" the latter asked.

"That the English squadron is practically without coal," he replied, steadily.

"But—the vessels from South America."

"Steps have been taken to delay their departure, even to prevent it altogether. As you may perhaps know, we have a very efficient organization throughout Brazil and the Argentine. There will be strikes among the workmen when the coal is being loaded. The engines of the vessels will have been tampered with. Explosive bombs will be placed aboard them, along with the coal. Compasses will be put out of order, wireless apparatus disarranged. I feel safe in saying that not a pound of coal will reach the Falkland Islands from South America within the next thirty days. The British will arrive there in less than fifteen."

"I see," Hoffman exclaimed, filled with admiration of the wonderful organization that enabled these people to control events with such perfect assurance, thousands of miles away.

"Now the point," Herr Schwartz went on, "is this. The British, of course, do not know that we possess any information regarding the destination of their fleet. They believe their movements entirely unknown. They will arrive

at the Falklands, with empty bunkers, expecting to refill them from the supply from South America. That supply not being on hand, they will of course wait for it. Then will come our chance. Von Spee will dash into the harbor in the early morning, catch the British ships with no steam up, sink them at their anchorages, and depart, before they realize what has happened."

"I see," Hoffman gasped, almost terrified at the vision thus presented to him. "You have them at your mercy."

"Not quite. We need information on one point. Without it, we dare not act."

"What is that?"

"The amount of coal at Port William. A reliable agent of our government informed us, six weeks ago, that the supply had then been reduced to less than a thousand tons, a trifling amount, when the needs of a large battle squadron are to be considered. But that was six weeks ago. Since then, additional supplies may have been received. We are unable to obtain any accurate information, although we have repeatedly made the attempt. Only two weeks ago, one of our agents who had managed to reach the islands was arrested and shot. We believe that the English authorities there are taking extraordinary precautions to prevent

the fact of their depleted coal supply from becoming known."

"And what is it you expect me to do?" asked Hoffman.

"I expect you to find out, absolutely, and beyond all question, how much coal is stored at the Falklands. If you can assure us, by actual figures, from the Admiralty Naval Staff itself that *there is no coal there,* we will order von Spee to attack the English squadron as soon as it arrives. If you report to the contrary, our vessels will be ordered elsewhere. That is the task I have laid out for you. It involves the safety of von Spee's entire fleet. Upon your reply hangs the question of victory! It is a grave, a terrible responsibility."

"I do not know that I can obtain the information," Hoffman replied. "It will be extremely difficult."

"I am quite well aware of that. But you—and you alone, are sufficiently close to the Admiralty to get it. We are entrusting you with a great task. We have tested you, over and over, in ways unknown to you, and we are satisfied that you are honest, that you are working in our interests. I have discussed the question with our high command. As you perceive, I have only just returned." He pointed to the satchel beside the desk. "They agree with me

that you must make the attempt. If you fail, there is nothing lost, and von Spee will sail to the east. If you succeed, it will mean a glorious victory. I am authorized to pay you, in cash, for the information I ask, one hundred thousand marks!"

"It is a large sum!" Hoffman replied. "But the news will be quite worth it."

"You accept?" cried Herr Schwartz, regarding him with eager eyes.

"On one condition."

"Name it."

"That this shall be the last work I do for you," Hoffman replied.

"Why do you make that condition?" asked Herr Schwartz, frowning.

"I will tell you. In the first place, the sum of money you name will be ample for my needs. I shall be satisfied with it."

"Yes. Go on. That is not your real reason. One never has too much money."

"In the second place, the work is distasteful to me."

"Conscience, eh?" the German sneered. "I was afraid of that. You Americans are all alike."

"It is not because I am an American," Hoffman retorted. "It is because I am doing a dis-

honorable thing. I am taking advantage of a friend."

"So!" The secret agent gazed suspiciously at the face of the man before him. "Young man," he remarked at length, "I know your real reason, and all I can say is, you are a fool."

"To what reason do you refer?" Hoffman asked, hotly.

"To Lord Brooke's sister, Miss Patricia. I have known for some time that your feelings for her are more than those of a friend. The young woman who is acting with you in London has already informed me of that danger. She tested you. She tried to attract you herself—she in fact offered you her affections, and failed, in spite of the fact that she has beauty enough to attract any man who is not in love. In such matters as this, it is always the woman who comes in to upset our plans. You have fallen in love with this English girl, and that is why you wish to give up your work for us."

Hoffman flushed at the agent's words. He seemed to be making a violent effort to control himself.

"Is not what I say true?" Herr Schwartz flung at him.

"Suppose it is," Hoffman replied. "I am

ready to carry out the orders you have just given me. If, after that, I decide to discontinue my work, it is no affair of yours."

"You are mistaken. It *is* our affair. You might turn against us."

"To what purpose? With the exception of Miss Liebmann, I know no one in England who is connected with your office. I could do you no harm. You have taken good care of that."

The German nodded with menacing gravity.

"Yes. What you say is true. We have taken good care of that. And furthermore, my friend, we should not fail to take equally good care of you. If you were to attempt any treachery, we would snuff you out as I would snuff out a candle."

"Then," Hoffman said, "I do not see what difference it makes, whether I go on with this dirty work, or not. After all, my opportunities to gain information, once this affair of the Falkland Islands comes out, will be reduced to a minimum. It will be clear that, somewhere, there has been a leak. Lord Brooke will be afraid to open his mouth, even to me. My usefulness will be at an end."

The logic of Hoffman's words evidently appealed to his companion. He nodded his head slowly.

"Yes," he said. "In that I believe you are

right. Very well, it shall be as you say. But on these conditions: First, you will send the information when you obtain it, to me, by Mademoiselle Liebmann. No other way will do, and besides, I wish her to get safely out of England. In the second place, you will come here, to Antwerp, to collect your reward. Then I shall know that you are not trying to play me false. Also, should anything happen to prevent Mademoiselle Liebmann from reaching me, I shall obtain the information from you. In affairs of such grave importance, we never trust to a single messenger."

Hoffman considered the matter carefully for a moment.

"Very well," he said. "I will bring the information to you in person, and claim the reward. I will also send it by Mademoiselle Liebmann. Please instruct me as to how I am to communicate with her, when the time comes."

"You will go to this address," Herr Schwartz replied, writing some words on a card. "It is a tobacconist's shop just off the Strand. You will ask for a tin of pipe tobacco. The man who waits on you will ask you what kind. You will say 'Admiralty Mixture.' The man will then put you in communication with Mademoiselle Liebmann."

"I see," Hoffman remarked. "That is all

very simple and clear. After I have given my message to her, I will report to you in person."

"Precisely. But do not come by the same boat. If anything were by chance to happen to her, *you* must not fail to get through without delay."

"In that event," Hoffman remarked quickly, "I think it inadvisable for me to depend upon the German consul at Rotterdam. I might decide to come by a different route. I think it advisable that you furnish me with some means of passing your lines, and entering Belgium, at any point. In a matter so important, it is not well to take any risks."

Schwartz gave him a quick look.

"You are right," he said. "The consul at Rotterdam might be away—or ill. Nothing must be left to chance." He opened a drawer in his desk, and drew from it a small brass disc, about the size and thickness of an English sovereign. "Take this," he said. "It will gain you passage through our lines at any point, provided it be shown to a commissioned officer."

Hoffman took the brass disc and looked at it in astonishment.

"How can this be of any service to me?" he asked. "It is perfectly blank."

Herr Schwartz smiled.

"Nevertheless," he said, "it will do as I have told you. More than that, you need not know."

Hoffman rose, and slipped the disc into his waistcoat pocket.

"Very well," he said. "If it does n't, it will be your loss, not mine. I assume that you wish me to get through."

"I do, most emphatically," returned the secret agent, rubbing his hands. "And you will. When you get here, report to the Military Governor, as you did before. I will leave instructions which will enable you to find me instantly."

"Is there anything else?" Hoffman asked, taking up his hat.

"Only this. Try to get the information you are after at as late a date as possible. While there may be no coal at Port William today, some might arrive, from unexpected sources, next week. I estimate that the English squadron will not arrive for two weeks more, at the least. Let your information coincide, as nearly as possible, with the time of their arrival."

"Very good. I shall report in two weeks. Good-night."

A few moments later, Hoffman was engaging a room at a nearby hotel.

CHAPTER XV

THE next ten days of Bob Hoffman's life were entirely uneventful, in singular contrast with those which had immediately preceded them. All the intrigue, the danger, the double-dealing by which he had been surrounded seemed to have vanished. He saw no more of Mademoiselle Liebmann, he had no further visits from the police, he sent no mysterious messages, and received none. Instead, he spent the greater part of his time going about with Patricia Brooke, glad to act as her escort, to the meetings of various patriotic societies in the work of which she was interested. It was not very exciting, but Hoffman derived a great deal of happiness from it.

He had met Patricia, on his return, in a somewhat shamefaced way. The situation was rather absurd. Two days before he had confessed his love to the girl, and had parted from her as though he did not expect to see her again, for a long time. He had been obliged to do that, for, having pretended that he was going to Rotterdam, in order to, if possible,

reach the front, it necessarily followed that success in his efforts would keep him away from London for months. He had every reason to believe, when he left, that his stay would be a matter of hours only. To explain his quick return was difficult; he said, in a few words, that a friend in Rotterdam had tried to get him entrance to Belgium, but that the effort had failed. He could say no more—there was, indeed, no more to say. The resulting situation was very much in the nature of an anti-climax. He was reminded of the King of France, and his ten thousand men, who marched up the hill, and then marched down again. Patricia, however, received his explanations without comment. If the truth were known, she was rather glad to have the young American back again. Since his declaration of love for her, Patricia Brooke's heart had been beating with considerable irregularity, especially when Hoffman's name was mentioned by her brother or Lady Brooke.

Neither she nor Hoffman, however, referred again in any way to this declaration. It had been made on the eve of parting. In such circumstances, it was perhaps appropriate. To go back to it, now that Hoffman had so promptly returned, was impossible. Both knew that the time for doing so had not yet arrived.

Hoffman asserted, with positiveness, that within two weeks, or three at the outside, he would be given every facility to go to the trenches. He would not tell Patricia why he felt so supremely confident of this. "I can't explain just now," he told her. "But you will see that I am right. My plans are being laid very carefully."

There the matter had ended. They met each other as dear friends. Hoffman's visits to his sister's house were frequent; in fact scarcely a day passed but he and Lord Brooke met. Yet his lordship vouchsafed him no further confidences. He did not once make the slightest reference to the affairs of his office. The fast battle cruiser squadron under Sturdee seemed to have passed entirely from his mind.

Hoffman began to feel some anxiety, as the days wore on, and at last summoned up courage to ask his brother-in-law a direct question.

"Any news from Sturdee?" he said one day at tea, in the most off-hand way.

"Not a line," Lord Brooke had replied, very promptly. "We shan't hear, you know, until he reaches his destination."

"Not even by wireless?"

"No. Too dangerous. The Germans tap our wireless messages continually. We 'll get word by cable, when he arrives. There 's a

cable station there, you know. But not before."

Hoffman, realizing that for the present he could do no more, resigned himself to impatiently waiting. But as the end of the two weeks designated by Herr Schwartz approached, he began to grow more and more anxious, and made it a point to spend an hour or two at Lady Brooke's every day.

Patricia noticed his nervousness, and commented upon it.

"What on earth is the matter with you, Bob? You are certainly not yourself. Why—over and over I say things to you, only to find that you have n't even heard me. This morning I asked you if you were dreaming, and you said 'Yes,' in the most matter-of-fact way, just as though you really had been."

"Perhaps I was," Hoffman replied with a smile. "I do a lot of it, now-a-days."

"What about?" she teased.

"Oh—plans I have under way, and—you."

"Anyone might suppose, from what you say, that I had something to do with your—plans."

"You have. Everything. I can't explain them to you, of course, but they concern us both, vitally. You see, Pat, I have n't forgotten what I said to you a few days ago, before I left for Rotterdam. Of course, my coming back so soon

must have seemed rather silly to you, and all that. But don't think for a moment that I have given up. I 've got something tremendous under way. I can't tell you what it is—indeed, I am afraid, if you knew, you 'd rather hate me for it, but that can't be helped. I 'm going to the front, just as I 've always said I would, and it won't be long, either, before I start."

"All this is very mysterious," Patricia laughed gaily. "To hear you talk, anyone might suppose that you had the weight of nations on your shoulders."

"Perhaps I have," Hoffman rejoined, quickly, then changed the subject.

The fourteenth day after his interview with Herr Schwartz passed as uneventfully as all the others had done. He had not seen Patricia during the forenoon—some shopping, a visit to the hairdresser's, had occupied her. He lunched alone, and, as was his habit, dropped in at Lady Brooke's for tea. He had none of the Englishman's keen love for the beverage, but the function made of it pleased him. At the tea hour, business, one's own personal affairs, were forgotten. The little group that gathered at Lord Brooke's discussed politics, principally, and the war. Hoffman listened. It always surprised him, to hear women, English girls, such as Patricia, talk of ministers, and cabinet

crises, and measures of public safety, with a freedom and insight quite foreign to the women of his own country.

On this particular afternoon there were several guests, women, all but one, an attaché of one of the Allied legations. Lord Brooke himself, contrary to his usual habit, was not present. Perhaps, Hoffman thought, the work at the Admiralty had been more pressing than usual. He hoped so, hoped that it concerned the arrival of the squadron at Port William. He seemed able to think of nothing else, these past few days. It was a great relief to him when, upon the departure of her guests, Lady Brooke asked him to stay on for dinner.

"I 'm worried about you, Bob," his sister said. "You look pale, worn, out of sorts. Why don't you go to Paris for a change? After all, if the English War Office won't let you go to the front, there are others. In France, I am told, they are not so particular. And if you could n't do more, you might at least visit the battlefield of the Marne. I read a most interesting account in one of our American magazines, the other day, of the destruction of the villages in that section."

Hoffman thanked his sister for her suggestion but showed no inclination to act upon it.

"I have other plans," he said, shortly. "I

can't tell you about them now, Nelly, but I think there is every chance of their going through."

Lord Brooke arrived just as dinner was being served. He seemed to be laboring under suppressed excitement. He greeted Hoffman with evident satisfaction, and inquired keenly as to his affairs.

The young man told him nothing, intimating that there was nothing to tell.

"I may be obliged to make one more trip to Rotterdam, in the near future," he said. "There is a man over there who has promised to get me through the lines—for a consideration—"

"What consideration?" Lord Brooke asked.

"I can't exactly say," replied Hoffman, flushing. "He has asked me to do certain things for him, and if I succeed in doing them, I will be in a position to demand certain favors in return. Whether I shall succeed or not remains to be seen."

He spoke in a way that did not invite further discussion, and the talk drifted to other matters. When dinner was over, Lord Brooke announced that he was going to his study to work. To Hoffman's surprise, he suggested that the latter should accompany him.

"I 'm going to have a comfortable smoke, first, Bob," he said. "Won't you join me in a

cigar? Lieutenant Forbes, who has just returned from the West Indies, has sent me over some fine ones—real vuelta tobacco. Come along."

They passed down the hall together, and entered the study. It was a small, cozy room at the rear of the drawing- and music-rooms, from the latter of which it was separated by a curtained doorway. The curtains were closed, but the door itself was not. Hoffman knew that Patricia was in the music-room adjoining, for he could hear her, playing very softly, on the piano. Lord Brooke, as he entered the study, closed behind him the door leading to the hall.

"Have a chair," he said, throwing himself into a seat before the carved Jacobean table, and taking a box of cigars from one of its drawers.

Hoffman sat down in an easy chair between the table and the music-room door. Lighting his cigar, he waited nervously for Lord Brooke to speak. He did not dare question him, but in some intangible way he felt that his companion, over his after-dinner cigar, would resume the frank and communicative mood that had been so noticeably a feature of their relations in the past.

"Splendid cigar!" Hoffman observed, allow-

ing the fragrant blue smoke to curl upward in tiny rings.

"Yes. Isn't it? I find smoking a great relief after a hard day."

"I suppose you are pretty busy at the Admiralty office, now-a-days?" Hoffman remarked.

"Frightfully. I 'm all worn out. This expedition of Sturdee's has got us all on edge. We *must* get that German squadron. Simply must."

"How are things going? Well, I hope."

"No. They are not. That 's just the trouble. Sturdee has arrived at Port William. We received a cable from him today. But he 's short of coal."

"Why?" Hoffman asked, pretending a calmness he by no means felt. His companion's words burnt into his brain in characters of fire. "Is n't there plenty at Port William?"

"No, there is n't, although there should be. Six different vessels should have arrived, long ago, from South America. Not one has gotten in. Those Germans are responsible for that. I 've been worried about the situation all the week."

"Have n't these vessels left?"

"Three have left. The others are detained by labor troubles, strikes, peculiar accidents, all

the work of spies, of course. What has become of the three that sailed, the Lord only knows. They may be at the bottom of the Atlantic, for all the information we have. It 's not difficult, you know, to put a bomb or two aboard a coal ship. One of the coal handlers, in the enemy's pay, can easily do the trick. There 's the thing, hidden away under tons of coal, ticking away, its clockwork set for say forty-eight or seventy-two hours, and a few hundred miles off shore the vessel disappears, and that 's the end of her."

"Dirty work," Hoffman remarked.

"It 's war. I don't blame them, although our own people don't care to emulate them. We 've got to think of the poor devils aboard, who are not concerned in the fight, one way or the other. Coal is contraband, of course, but up to this war, neutrals aboard neutral ships, even if they did carry contraband, were supposed to be given a chance for their lives. But to go back to Sturdee. He gets to Port William, expecting to coal. His long cruise, at forced draught, has emptied his bunkers. And he finds no coal. Devil of a situation. If the Germans knew how he was situated, which, thank God, they don't, they would be on top of him in no time. A ship may be all right, as to guns, and ammunition, but without coal she 's a helpless hulk."

"But do you mean to say there was n't any stored at Port William?"

"Not a ton. At least not enough to be of any service. We had counted on the vessels from South America."

"What can he do, then?"

"Nothing, but trust to Providence, and wait the arrival of the three coal ships now on the way."

"Rather a serious situation," Hoffman remarked, chewing nervously on his cigar.

"Damned serious. Look here." The Englishman drew a sheet of paper from his pocket and laid it upon the desk. Hoffman saw that it was in the form of a dispatch, written in longhand upon the official letter paper of the Admiralty office. "Here is a transcript of Sturdee's message," Lord Brooke went on. "It was sent in code, of course. Is it any wonder we are disturbed?" He passed the document over to Hoffman for his inspection.

The latter read it with breathless interest.

"Arrived at Port William noon today. No coal at hand. Hurry vessels from mainland. Am helpless until they arrive."

"And you have heard nothing of the three vessels for which he is waiting?"

"Nothing. They seem to have vanished completely. All were equipped with wireless, of

course, but our attempts to pick them up have failed. Sturdee is in a serious plight."

"You have done nothing to remedy matters, I suppose?" Hoffman asked.

"Yes. All that we could. Additional vessels have been ordered to the Falklands, from the nearest shipping points on the mainland. But think of the loss of time. It may be two weeks before the difficulty is remedied. In that time, the Germans may have escaped, or, what is worse, they may learn of Sturdee's situation, and attack. The result would be a tragedy for the fleet, for the whole nation."

Hoffman made no reply. With tense interest he gazed at the paper in his hands. Something told him that, in some way, he must obtain possession of it. To report the matter, verbally, to Herr Schwartz, would no doubt be sufficient, but to hand to his employer the written proof—that, indeed, would be indisputable evidence of the truth of his statements. And just then, as though fate had suddenly decided to play into his hands, one of the servants came to the door of the study, and informed Lord Brooke that someone wanted to speak to him over the telephone.

The instrument was located in an alcove between the dining-room and the library. Hoffman rose, as his companion did, and handed him

the sheet of paper. Lord Brooke thrust it into one of the drawers of the desk.

"Pardon me for a moment, Bob," he said. "You can wait here."

As soon as the Englishman left the room, Hoffman leaned over, and sliding open the drawer, took out the paper containing the cable message. If he could not secure the original, he argued, he at least could make a copy of it. Placing the paper on his knee, he began to transcribe it in his notebook.

He had scarcely completed the first two words, when it seemed to him that he heard a faint sound behind him, as though the heavy velvet curtains had been drawn aside. Hastily thrusting the message and notebook into his pocket, he turned, with an air of careless indifference. The curtains were closed, but a slight vibration suggested that they had recently been disturbed.

He sat in silence for a moment, uncertain what to do. Before he could make up his mind whether to continue copying the message, and replace it in the drawer, or to retain the original, Lord Brooke appeared at the doorway leading to the hall. He had put on his overcoat, and held his hat and stick in his hand.

"Sorry to leave you, old chap," he said, heartily, "but they want me at the Admiralty."

"News from the Falklands, perhaps," Hoffman suggested, rising.

"No. I wish you were right. Some question of submarine activity, I believe. I shan't see you again, I 'm afraid, as I 'll be rather late getting back. Good-bye." He shook hands and was gone.

Hoffman quietly closed the drawer of the desk, which he had left open when removing the letter. He thanked his stars that his brother-in-law had not observed it. Then, with the stolen dispatch safely in his pocket, he pushed aside the curtains behind him and entered the music-room.

Patricia sat at the far side of the room, in a deep window-seat, looking out into the courtyard beside the house. She seemed deep in thought, and did not turn her head when the young American entered.

"Patricia," he said, slowly, wondering whether it had been she who had drawn aside the curtains at the doorway of the study, or whether he had, after all, been mistaken. The slight trembling of the velvet that he had observed might, he reflected, have been caused by a draught, a current of air.

Patricia looked up. There was no answering smile upon her face. Instead, her features seemed suddenly to have grown pale and old.

"Where is Alan?" she asked.

"He was called away—to the Admiralty office. He said he would n't be back until late."

The girl put her hands to her head, and went toward the door.

"You must pardon me, Bob," she said, in a dull, hopeless voice. "I—I have a terrible headache. I think I shall go upstairs." Almost before Hoffman realized it, she had left him.

What had happened to so change her manner toward him? Had she seen him copying the cable dispatch? That in itself would have told her nothing; the paper might readily have been his own. Then he remembered that, but an instant before, he had deliberately taken that paper from one of the drawers of his brother-in-law's desk. If Patricia had seen *that,* he could very well understand her agitation. But had she? He longed desperately to know, yet his duty lay before him, brooking no delay. But one thing occupied his mind, to find Mademoiselle Liebmann, and put her in possession of the contents of the dispatch as quickly as possible.

Lady Brooke, coming in at that moment, inquired for Patricia. Hoffman told her that the girl had complained of a headache, and gone to her room.

"I 'm obliged to be off myself, Nelly," he said.

"What 's your hurry?" his sister asked. "Why don't you stop a while, and talk to me?"

"I 'd love to, but really, there 's a matter I 've got to attend to at once. And, Nelly, if I don't appear, in the morning, tell Patricia I 've been obliged to leave London for a while."

"Why—where are you going?"

"To Rotterdam, perhaps. After that I can't say."

"For long?"

"I can't tell you that, either. You know my plans."

"Well, Bob, I must say, all this is very sudden. You didn't say anything about it at dinner."

"No. I 've only made up my mind, during the past half hour. Good-bye. And don't forget to tell Pat." He shook his sister's hand, kissed her quickly on the cheek, and was gone. Lady Brooke, with a quiet smile, went up to inquire after Patricia. Hoffman, on his part, made his way as quickly as possible to his rooms.

CHAPTER XVI

IT was not an aching head that sent Patricia Brooke so precipitately to her room, there to burst into sobs upon the pillows of a couch. Rather it was an aching heart. She had softly drawn aside the curtains between the music-room and her brother's study, knowing that Hoffman was sitting there alone, and meaning playfully to surprise him. As matters turned out, it was she herself who was surprised. Just as the opening between the soft folds of velvet became large enough for her to perceive the interior of the study, Hoffman leaned forward, drew open one of the desk drawers and took out the despatch. With eyes wide from amazement and horror, Patricia saw him take out his note-book and begin to copy it. She glimpsed the official heading of the document, realized that it pertained to Admiralty business, then fell back with a gasp as Hoffman turned toward her.

That he had not seen her, she knew, and for this she was thankful. Whatever he had done, it would have been infinitely worse for him to have realized that she had detected him in his theft. Caring for him as she did, she in vain

strove to find some palliation, some excuse, for his deceit. She could discover none. The paper belonged to her brother. Hoffman had deliberately taken it from the desk drawer, and stolen its contents, if not the document itself. And it referred to official business—business, perhaps, entailing the utmost secrecy. In all her life Patricia Brooke had never experienced so bitter a shock. To think that the brother of her sister-in-law, and, more than all, the man she loved, could have descended to so base, so contemptible an action! It was incredible. Almost she began to doubt the reality of what she had seen. There *must* be some explanation. If she could only have talked with her brother. But Lord Brooke was at the Admiralty, where he could not be disturbed, hence even *that* consolation was denied her. Her anger, her chagrin, her humiliation, found vent in sobs.

It was thus that Lady Brooke came upon her, and presently extracted from her an account of what had happened.

The older woman at first refused to believe what Patricia told her. It was too grotesque, too absurd. Her brother, Bob Hoffman, was incapable of such an action; she knew him better than that. But when Patricia reiterated her story, with all its incriminating details, she became convinced that Patricia had at least seen

what she described, whatever explanation of the circumstances might come later on to relieve Bob of the stain upon his character. She sat down beside the girl, and tried to evolve some plausible theory for her brother's action, but she could find none. In fact, the more she thought about the matter, the worse it seemed.

"Patricia," she whispered, in an agonized voice to her sister-in-law, "Bob, when he left, asked me to say good-bye to you. He said he might not see you again for a long time."

"Why not?" The girl sat up, drying her eyes. "Is he going away?"

"Yes. He said he expected to leave for Rotterdam immediately."

Patricia rose to her feet, her face white.

"Nelly," she cried. "I hate to say such a thing, but don't you see what this sudden departure means? Don't you see the reason for it? There was no such reason, at dinner. But after dinner, your brother finds—steals, not to mince matters, an important paper from Alan's desk. Suppose that paper contains information of value to the enemy. Would not its possessor go to the Continent at once, in order to dispose of it?"

Lady Brooke, with flushed cheeks, turned angrily upon her companion.

"Patricia!" she cried. "How can you say

such a thing? Bob—my brother, Bob—steal government secrets—here—in this house, and then go to the Continent to *sell* them! God! It 's unbelievable!"

"Don't you think, Nelly, that I should like to think so as earnestly as you?" Patricia replied, gravely. "Do you know that your brother has told me that he loves me, and that I—I meant to accept him? Do you think it is easy for *me,* then, to believe such things about him? But what else can I do?"

"At least we can give him an opportunity to defend himself."

"Oh!" Patricia cried. "If we only could. But he 's gone." She remembered, now, that Hoffman had used those very words to her, had begged her, in case anything happened reflecting on him in any way that she would not condemn him until he had had an opportunity to explain.

"Then we must wait until he comes back," said Lady Brooke, with decision.

"No!" Patricia cried, in an agonized voice. "We *can't* wait. There is more than just Bob's honor at stake. There is England—the good of the country. Don't you see we can't wait? Suppose the information he secured here involves a matter of national importance. It may be that he wanted it only for use in some

literary work. But we must be sure. Don't you see? That information must never leave England, no matter what it is." She sprang to the closet and began to put on a long dark coat. "You say Bob is going to Rotterdam. There 's no way for him to get there, tonight, unless he hires a special boat, and I 'm quite sure he can't do that. I 'm going to see him tonight. I can't let him leave England, until what I saw here this evening has been explained."

Lady Brooke tried in vain to dissuade her from her intention, pointing out all sorts of difficulties which Patricia promptly and decisively brushed aside.

"I made a mistake," the girl said, "not to have demanded an explanation from him at once, when I saw what he had done. But I was confused, overcome. It did not occur to me, then, that any question of national importance might be involved. I thought only of Bob, and, in thinking of him, I did not wish to shame him by letting him know what I had seen. But I was wrong. I see that now. I only hope that I may be able to find him before it is too late."

"But," Lady Brooke observed, "you yourself admit that he cannot leave England before tomorrow. Why not wait until Alan comes home, and lay the whole thing before him.

Then let him go to Bob's rooms, and have the matter out with him."

"Because," Patricia said, grimly, "even though Bob may not leave England tonight he still can deliver this information to someone else. Otherwise, why was he in such a hurry to leave here, just now?"

"Oh!" gasped Lady Brooke. "How can you even *think* such a thing?"

"Why not? We have all been blind—blind. Have you forgotten the night I followed that Mercier woman. Something told me, then, that she was a spy. Where did I find her? At your brother's rooms. And what happened, when a man from Scotland Yard came to question her? Your brother knocked the man down, and thus allowed the woman to escape. Alan made light of the matter, and I allowed myself to be persuaded. Now I see it all. God forgive me for saying such a thing, but I believe that your brother, and that woman, were acting together."

"You say that, after telling me that you loved him?"

"Whether I loved him or not, my first duty is to my country. You are not an Englishwoman. I am. I would turn against my own brother, if I thought he was a traitor. Tell him, when he returns, what I have done. I

don't know when I shall be back. I 'm going to find Bob Hoffman, if it takes me all night." With flushed cheeks and flying hair she rushed to the hall below and ordered her electric car to be brought out at once.

Lady Brooke no longer attempted to dissuade her. The horror of the situation had almost broken her heart. In spite of the attempts she made to defend her brother, she was forced to admit to herself that the evidence was sorely against him. And still she could not bring herself to believe that Bob was capable of such treachery. In a state of utter dejection she awaited her husband's return.

Patricia departed in stony silence, and at top speed drove to Exmouth Street. She scarcely hoped to find Bob there, but it was necessary for her to make the attempt. A sense of hopelessness swept over her. Suppose he was not there. What could she do then? She drove her motor at greater speed, realizing that at Exmouth Street lay her only hope.

The street was dark and gloomy, and as she swept into it from the Farrington Road, she reduced her speed, and proceeded slowly along the curb. The houses on the other side were silent, and for the most part unlighted. She stopped her car opposite the one in which Hoff-

man had his rooms, and tried to make up her mind what to do next.

She could wait for a time, of course, in the hope that he might come out. But, if by chance he had already left the place, she might sit where she was indefinitely, without accomplishing anything. Clearly it was necessary to determine, at once, whether or not Hoffman was within. She had just reached this decision, and placed her hand upon the catch of the door of the car, when a sudden light in the entrance of the house opposite made her pause. Then she caught a glimpse of Hoffman, carrying a satchel, leaving the place. The sudden closing of the door behind him, shut off the light. Only a dim figure in the gloom of the street remained to indicate that she had really seen anyone at all.

Patricia's first impulse was to jump from the car, to call to him, to tax him at once with the theft of the paper and demand an explanation. Then she realized the hopelessness of such action on her part. Hoffman would, no doubt, offer some plausible excuse, pretend to be hurt, angry, and leave her, with nothing actually accomplished. She felt that it would be better, could she find out what he was about to do—to confront him in some compromising situation.

Was he, perhaps, on his way to meet Mademoiselle Mercier, the former seamstress? A feeling of jealousy arose in the girl's heart. She did not open the door of the car, but instead, turned and proceeded up the street some hundred or more feet in Hoffman's rear.

At the corner, the young American jumped into a cab. Patricia was glad of this, as she was able to follow without attracting his attention. After about a quarter of an hour, the cab ahead of her stopped before a small tobacco shop, just off the Strand. Patricia saw Hoffman get out, enter the place, and purchase a tin of tobacco. This he proceeded to open; then, having filled and lighted his pipe, he reentered the cab and drove off.

Again Patricia followed, this time for nearly half an hour. When at last the pursuit ended before a small detached house in a gloomy and to her quite unknown square, she saw Hoffman dismiss the cab, and quickly enter the place. Patricia's heart was in her mouth. Here, she instinctively felt, was to be found a solution of the ghastly problem that had been torturing her soul for the past hour.

As she saw Hoffman get out of the cab, and enter the house, she at once made up her mind to follow him. She waited for a moment, until the door had closed, and then, leaving her car,

she advanced cautiously up the little path beyond the iron gate.

The house seemed to be in absolute darkness. Patricia debated for a moment whether she should ring the bell, and boldly demand admittance, or try to see what was going on inside, before making a move that would put Hoffman and whoever was with him on their guard. The latter course seemed to promise the best results; in pursuance of it she stopped, on reaching the front door, and stepping softly, so as to make not the slightest noise, turned to the left, and passed around to the side of the house.

The windows on this side, like those in front, were covered with heavy shades, but a faint streak of light, not over an inch in width, showed the girl that one of the shades had not been drawn quite to the bottom. Going noiselessly up to the window, she peered in. Then she gave a gasp of dismay.

All her worst fears were at once realized. She clung to the sill of the window, fighting down the gusts of sobs that threatened to overwhelm her. For almost ten minutes she crouched there in the snow, her eyes glued to the narrow aperture. Then, with a shudder of horror, she rose and went toward the street. Whatever hopes she may have had of Hoffman's innocence were gone. With her features

set in a mask, hard as flint, she hurried through the gate and began to look for a policeman.

The search did not take long. Scarcely had she gained the sidewalk when she saw an officer approaching from the direction of the corner, attracted, no doubt, by the presence of her motor in this quiet square. It did not take her long to explain to the man who she was, and why she desired his help.

"A valuable paper, containing government secrets, was stolen from my brother's study this evening. Lord Brooke was not at home, at the time. The man who committed the theft is in this house, delivering the paper to a woman who, I have reason to believe, is a German spy. I followed him here. They must both be arrested at once."

The officer perceived, from her excitement, that she was thoroughly in earnest. Without further parley, he entered the gateway, and proceeded to the door of the house, with Patricia at his heels.

CHAPTER XVII

WITH the copy of the cablegram from Admiral Sturdee safely in his coat pocket, Bob Hoffman left his sister and proceeded at once to his rooms in Exmouth Street. He was rather glad that Patricia had pleaded a headache, and left him, since explanations of his hasty departure were thus rendered unnecessary.

There were several reasons for his going at once to his rooms, not the least of which was the necessity of packing his satchel. He determined, in seeking Mademoiselle Liebmann, to take his luggage along with him, since he had no means of knowing where she might be, whether in London, or out of it, and it was clearly the part of wisdom to be prepared to leave for Antwerp at the earliest possible moment.

The operation of packing did not take very long. He glanced once more at the despatch he had thrust into his pocket, then placed it

carefully in an inside compartment of his pocketbook, along with the mysterious brass disc given him by Herr Schwartz. A memorandum of his instructions, the address of the tobacconist, he re-read, in order to refresh his memory, then burnt in the fireplace. Half an hour after entering the house, he was ready to set out again.

Perhaps one of the strongest reasons for his determination to take his satchel with him, and not return again before leaving for Antwerp, arose from a very definite fear that Lord Brooke might discover the loss of the despatch, and come to him in search of it. Such a *contretemps* must, he realized, be avoided at all costs. Picking up his satchel, and turning off the lights, he slipped noiselessly downstairs and left the house.

The tobacconist's shop being some distance away, Hoffman hailed a cab. He did not observe the small electric brougham that turned the corner just as he drove off. In fact, his mind was far too deeply concerned with the business of the moment, to render him very observant of external things. He had before him a perilous adventure, one that might very readily cost him his life. He sat back in the cab, his eyes closed, revolving in his mind the problem that confronted him.

It seemed but a few moments before the cab drew up in front of the tobacconist's shop. Hoffman, leaving his satchel in the cab, entered, and glanced curiously about.

There were two men behind the counter, one a young fellow, with watery blue eyes and light hair, the other a heavy dark man, perfectly bald and wearing a huge pair of spectacles with rims of tortoise shell. The dark man was busy over his books, and his assistant came to take Hoffman's order.

"I 'd like a tin of pipe tobacco," Hoffman said, in a loud voice.

"Yes, sir. What kind, sir?" the young man asked with an ingratiating smirk.

"Admiralty Mixture," Hoffman responded, his eye on the man with the spectacles.

"Admiralty Mixture!" the clerk exclaimed. "Never heard of it, sir. We can give you—"

"I 'll wait on this gentleman, Arthur," the proprietor said, rising quickly from his stool and fixing Hoffman with a look of keen interrogation. "We have n't the brand you want, sir," he went on, "but we put up a very fine mixture of our own." He reached into a drawer below the counter and took out a four ounce tin. "Here is something that I can recommend most highly, sir. I am sure it will

be exactly what you want." He gave a significant wink.

Hoffman gravely took the can of tobacco, and paid for it. Then he drew his pipe from his pocket, and opened the can. Upon the top lay a slip of paper, some two inches long and perhaps an inch wide. He noticed that there was writing on it. Thrusting it into his overcoat pocket, he proceeded to fill and light his pipe, and at once left the shop.

When he had entered the cab, he took the slip of paper from his pocket, and examined it by the light of a match. It contained nothing but an address. Leaning out, he communicated this to the driver of the cab, who at once started off.

In half an hour the cab drew up at a small detached house, at one side of a dejected looking square. There was an iron railing in front of the place, and the house stood some distance back of it, in a little patch of ground now covered with dirty snow. Satchel in hand, Hoffman stepped to the sidewalk, and having dismissed the cab, made his way to the front door of the house.

There was no sign of a bell, but a rusted iron knocker was affixed to the door. He lifted the knocker, and gently allowed it to fall.

For several moments there was no response.

Then the door was slowly opened, and Hoffman found himself gazing into the countenance of Mademoiselle Liebmann.

As soon as the woman saw him, she drew the door open.

"Come in," she said, with a brilliant smile.

Hoffman entered at once, and the girl closed and bolted the door behind him. Then, without a word, she led the way to a room at the left of the entrance hall. The place was softly lighted, but the heavy shades at the windows prevented this fact from being apparent from the street.

"How are you?" Miss Liebmann exclaimed, seating herself in an easy chair. "I 've been expecting you for the past two days."

Hoffman deposited his satchel beside the door and sat down.

"I 'm quite well," he said. "And you?"

"Never better, except that I 'm in need of fresh air. I have n't left this place for over two weeks. I hope you bring good news."

"Yes." The young man nodded. "Very good news."

"Then I am to go to Antwerp at once. Well—I 'm all ready." Hoffman saw that she wore a street dress, and that her small fur hat lay on the table before him.

"I was instructed," Hoffman went on, "to

communicate with you as soon as I had anything of importance to send over. The news I bring should reach Herr Schwartz without the least delay. How are you going to take it to him?"

The girl regarded him with a brilliant smile.

"That, of course, is my affair," she said. "There is no boat for Rotterdam until tomorrow morning. But I am able to do better than that. The matter has been carefully arranged. I have a fast motor car waiting for me at a nearby point. I can make the southeast coast in three hours, or less, if the roads are good. There, at an unfrequented point, a boat is waiting—a power boat, in which I shall cross the Channel. If all goes well, I shall be at Ostend by morning, and see Herr Schwartz before noon."

"I should think the wireless would be quicker," Hoffman remarked.

"It would be, but I do not dare to attempt to reach our people. The police know me. The risk is too great. My instructions from Herr Schwartz are to bring the news to him in person. If it is as important as I expect, we cannot afford to take any chances. There is far too much at stake."

"I see," said Hoffman, gravely. "Our friend in Antwerp is a man of caution."

"And what about you?" asked the girl, her eyes on the young American's face. "Are you to cross, too?"

"Yes."

"I 'm glad of that." She rose, and coming over to Hoffman, stood looking down at him with an eager expression. "In fact, I hope that you will not be able to return to England again."

"Why?"

"Don't you know?" A faint flush suffused the woman's features. "I do not expect to return, either. It is my hope that we may be able to see each other—often—when this is over."

Hoffman realized for the second time that the girl was showing more than a professional interest in him. He felt embarrassed, a bit afraid. Was this, also, a test?

"I hope so, too," he said, pretending a satisfaction he did not feel. "We shall be good friends, shall we not?"

"Friends!" Miss Liebmann put out her hand, and Hoffman took it. "More than friends, I trust, Mr. Hoffman," she whispered, pressing his fingers in hers. "But we are losing time." She glanced at the watch on her wrist. "What message am I to take to Herr Schwartz?"

Hoffman made no reply. Instead, he drew from his pocket the despatch he had taken from Lord Brooke's desk.

"Take him this," he said, handing it to his companion.

The girl seized the paper instantly, and devoured its contents, with flashing eyes.

"Himmel!" she said, softly. "God has delivered them into our hands!"

"You think Herr Schwartz will be satisfied?" Hoffman asked.

"Satisfied! He will make you rich—a baron," she cried, then before Hoffman realized what she was about, she leaned over and kissed him upon the lips. "My friend, you are splendid—superb. This is an original—on the paper of the Admiralty Office. How did you get it?"

"I stole it from my brother-in-law's desk."

"Then it is certain that you cannot return to England, for the theft will be discovered. I am glad—glad." She drew herself up, and began to put on her hat. "You will let me take this?" she said, indicating the paper which she had placed on the table. "You do not wish to take it yourself?"

"You will reach Antwerp first. I consider it best to send it by you."

"Yes—yes. That is best." She thrust the

paper into her bosom. "I shall leave at once. Wait here, until I get my hand satchel. I shall not be a moment." With a smile she ran from the room, and ascended the stairs.

Hoffman sat in deep thought, awaiting her return. Once or twice a grim smile crossed his face. All about him was silent. He could hear nothing but the faint patter of his companion's footfalls, as she crossed the room over his head.

Suddenly a more distinct sound vibrated against his consciousness. It was the clang made by the closing of the iron gate before the house. Almost immediately he heard the clatter of footsteps approaching the front door. With a cry of dismay he sprang to his feet.

Mademoiselle Liebmann had heard the sounds as well, for she came precipitately down the stairs, her coat over her arm, a small leather bag in one hand.

"What is it?" she gasped. "What has happened?"

As though in answer to her question, there came a heavy pounding on the front door.

"What shall we do?" Hoffman whispered. "It won't do to open it."

"No—no. Let me think!" The girl stood leaning against the newel post of the staircase, her face white with terror.

"Shall I ask who is there?" said Hoffman, going toward the door.

Scarcely had he spoken, when there came a crash as of a battering ram against the door, its fastenings gave way, and a burly policeman, truncheon in hand, burst into the hall. Behind him Hoffman perceived the figure of Patricia Brooke. For a moment, so great was his surprise, he was unable to speak.

Mademoiselle Liebmann acted more quickly. She turned like a flash and started toward the rear of the hall.

"Give me two minutes," she cried, "and I can get away. Hold them—hold them!"

The policeman and Patricia both perceived that their quarry was about to escape.

"Bob!" screamed the latter. "Help us!"

The officer wasted no time in idle requests.

"Get out of my way!" he roared, and sprang forward, truncheon raised.

Hoffman sprang at him with equal determination. There was no time to be lost. Lowering his head, so as to escape the coming blow, he plunged with outstretched arms at the policeman's legs. It was a manœuver not unfamiliar to him, since he had practiced it many a day, on the football field at home.

The policeman's truncheon descended harmlessly upon his back. At the same time, grasp-

ing his assailant's legs, Hoffman threw himself violently to one side. The result was inevitable. Both of them crashed to the floor in an inextricable tangle. Above the tumult, Hoffman heard Patricia's despairing cry.

"Bob!" she screamed. "Oh—my God!"

The policeman, a powerful man, was the first to gain his feet. As Hoffman rose, he brought his truncheon down with brutal force upon the young man's head. Hoffman lost consciousness, to the accompaniment of a cascade of stars. The policeman dashed toward the rear door, by which Mademoiselle Liebmann had effected her escape. He was too late. Before him lay a small rear yard. There was a wall, with a gate in it, beyond. Whether the fleeing woman had passed through the gate, or had sped around the house and reached the street in front, he was unable to determine. In neither direction was there the least sign of her. Cursing beneath his breath, the officer returned to the house.

Hoffman was lying on the floor, still unconscious, his head in a pool of blood. Over him stood Patricia, with so ghastly a look upon her face that the policeman shuddered.

"She got away, miss, thanks to this fellow here." He stirred Hoffman roughly with his foot.

"Oh—don't!" the girl looked down at the latter's blood-stained head. "He 's badly hurt."

"Good enough for him," the policeman muttered. "Get up here, young fellow!" He jerked Hoffman, who had begun to revive, to his feet. Patricia turned away.

The blow on his head had been a stunning one, but it had done no more than cut open the skin and flesh. The skull itself was not fractured. The policeman grasped his prisoner by the arm.

"Come along with me," he said, going toward the door. "I 'll put him in charge, miss, as soon as I get some help. The house has got to be searched."

Patricia led the way to the street. Her heart was broken. It seemed to her, after what had just occurred, that she did not care whether she lived or died.

CHAPTER XVIII

MADEMOISELLE LIEBMANN had made her plans for leaving London with the utmost care. The proprietor of the tobacco shop near the Strand, from whom Hoffman had secured her address, owned a fast motor car. It was not paid for from the proceeds of his tobacco business, which indeed, was a blind, as was his name, Lascelles, and his alleged French nationality. On the contrary, the expenses to which he was put, in the matter of motor cars, and many other things, were defrayed by funds supplied by the far-reaching hand of Herr Schwartz.

This fast motor car had been waiting for two days, in readiness for instant departure, in a small private garage maintained by the tobacconist a short distance from the house in which Mademoiselle Liebmann and Hoffman met. It was, in consequence, a simple matter for the former, after making her escape through the rear gateway of the place, to reach the

garage, and at once begin her flight. Before the overthrown constable had so much as reached the rear door by which she had escaped, the girl was on her way out of London.

The vehicle was a closed one. In a cardboard box on the rear seat were a wig, a hat and veil, a pair of eye-glasses. A rough travelling coat lay beside it. By the time the motor had progressed the distance of a mile, the woman who sat in the tonneau had so changed her appearance that while she might have been taken for a middle-aged school teacher, she certainly bore no resemblance to the young and handsome girl who had dashed into the garage so short a time before.

The chauffeur asked for no instructions. He had apparently been well schooled in his part. With set face, and an expression of calm determination he threaded the dark London streets, and, when the outskirts of the city had been reached, set off at high speed toward the southeast. He had made the trip many times before. The modest Mr. Lascelles, proprietor of a small tobacco shop, still maintained a summer cottage near Deal. Being extravagantly fond of the water, he also possessed a fast, sea-going motor boat. Just at present it lay, idle for the winter, in a small

boat-house at the water's edge. For two days past its gasoline tanks had been filled, and the man who sat beside it in the dark had only to throw open the boat-house doors, and release the pawls of a winch, to allow it to glide softly down the wooden ways into the water.

He was summoned to perform this operation by a signal, made by ringing a tiny bell which hung above his head. The signal had been made by the driver of the automobile, who had just arrived at the cottage in Mr. Lascelles' motor. Ten minutes later, Mademoiselle Liebmann was aboard and the boat was progressing rapidly toward the open channel, with no lights burning, and the exhaust carefully muffled. It was a dark night. The chances of avoiding the patrol boats were at least ten to one. Meanwhile, the motor car maintained by Mr. Lascelles was purring slowly back toward London.

The night was dark, with suggestions of snow flurries in the air. Luckily the sea was unusually calm. Like a serpent the sharp-bowed power boat slipped through the inky seas. Mademoiselle Liebmann, wrapped in her rough tweed coat, sat in the tiny cabin, protected from the gusts of spray that from time to time flung themselves over the bows, drenching the man at the wheel. The latter, silent,

imperturbable, had not spoken since the boat left Deal.

At the expiration of some four hours, and just as the dawn was beginning to break, the little craft ran swiftly alongside a deserted pier at Ostend. There was a sentry at the dock, but a few whispered words from the woman sent him flying for his superior officer. A conference of some moments with the latter resulted in Mademoiselle Liebmann landing, while the motor boat turned its nose seaward.

Late in the forenoon the girl descended from a railway carriage at Antwerp. Her entire journey had not occupied over twelve hours.

She sought Herr Schwartz at once, and found him at his office, close to the Hôtel de Ville. Carl, the secret agent's secretary, greeted her with a smile. Then he went in to announce her arrival to his superior.

"No. 16 has just arrived from London," he said.

Herr Schwartz muttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Show her in at once," he said. When Mademoiselle Liebmann entered the room, his features had resumed their impenetrable mask.

"Sit down," he said, indicating a chair. "You bring good news?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

The woman took the crumpled cablegram from her bosom. "This was given to me, last night, by Mr. Hoffman," she said, handing the bit of paper across the desk.

Herr Schwartz read the message. Upon his face no emotion was discernible, but his companion saw that his hand trembled.

"Where did Mr. Hoffman get this?" he asked.

"From the drawer of a desk in Lord Brooke's study. It is, I understand, a decoded copy of the original message."

"Dated yesterday," the secret service man added. "Was the theft discovered?"

"I think it must have been."

"Why?"

"Because, while I was conversing with Mr. Hoffman, the police broke in, led by Lord Brooke's sister."

"The police! How, then, did you escape?"

"Mr. Hoffman attacked the policeman, and threw him to the floor. I fear he has been arrested."

"Donnerwetter!" The secret agent frowned. "That is too bad. I had expected him here today. You are sure the attack by the police was genuine?"

"Absolutely. Mr. Hoffman was struck over

the head. I saw him fall. I should not be surprised to learn that he is badly hurt." She spoke with considerable emotion.

"Well, what difference does it make to you?" Herr Schwartz demanded in a bitter tone, bending his keen eyes on the girl. "Are you, too, allowing your heart to interfere with your duty?"

"I? Certainly not," she replied, straightening in her chair. "Mr. Hoffman is nothing to me—nothing at all. But I had understood that he, too, was to come to Antwerp. Now I fear he will not be able to do so."

Herr Schwartz did not appear to hear her last remark. He was examining with the closest attention the cablegram that lay before him.

"You have done very well, fraülein," he said, after a time. "This message is of the utmost importance, as you doubtless know. I must transmit it to headquarters at once. If there is no delay, von Spee should be on his way north within a few hours."

"We are in communication with him, then?"

"Yes. By wireless from the mainland. After that, both land and wireless to Berlin, via Sayville. The plant there is supposed to be operated under regulation by the United States Government, but we have no difficulty in

getting anything through that we want. In disguised code, of course," he added, as he turned toward the telephone instrument which stood at his elbow.

Mademoiselle Liebmann felt, rather than saw, that the interview had reached an end. She rose.

"My money," she said. "I have spent all that I had."

"H—m!" The secret agent grunted. "Make up your account of expenses and give it to me in the morning. Your salary, too, will be paid at the same time. Report here at nine o'clock. I may want you to go to Paris."

"Paris!" the girl exclaimed.

"Why not? You still have the papers of Mademoiselle Mercier, have you not?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Bring them with you. That is all, for tonight."

Mademoiselle Liebmann at once withdrew. As for Herr Schwartz, after a long conversation over the telephone he rose and put on his hat and coat.

"Carl," he said to his secretary, folding up the document that Mademoiselle Liebmann had brought him and placing it carefully in his pocket. "I am obliged to leave for a few hours, but I shall return before midnight.

Leave word with Becker, at the office of the Military Governor, that if the American, Hoffman, arrives, he is to be detained until I send for him. That is all."

"Very good!" The secretary bowed. "You will want me to wait, of course?"

"Of course. But Heinrich and the others may go. With the exception of Hoffman, I shall see no one tonight."

CHAPTER XIX

HOFFMAN, the blood caking unpleasantly in his hair and oozing slowly down beneath his collar, presently found himself being placed in a police ambulance. Patricia he had lost sight of; he fancied that she had driven off in her car. The view he had gotten of her face, as he staggered to his feet in the dimly lit hallway of the house, haunted him, filled him with grief and desolation. He realized fully what her feelings toward him must now be. That she had seen him steal the cablegram from Lord Brooke's desk he no longer doubted. And yet, in spite of his sorrow at the outcome of events, he put all this from his mind, and concentrated his thoughts upon a matter even more serious and immediate. He had told Herr Schwartz that he would come to Antwerp, and confirm, in person, the message sent by Miss Liebmann. It was imperative that he should go. The woman had escaped, for the time being, it was true, but

there was no certainty that she would ever reach her destination. A message of such supreme importance was not to be left to the chances of delivery by any one person. He must himself see that it reached the hands of Herr Schwartz, beyond all doubt.

"Where am I being taken?" he asked the policeman who sat beside him, only to learn that he was headed for the hospital, to have his broken head stitched up. This news, so far as it went, was good. But after that, what? His companion refused to give him any further information.

It was while he was having the wound in his head dressed, that Hoffman made up his mind what to do. Taking out his notebook, he tore from it a blank page, and then, raising his hand to his head, placed his thumb in the thick blood which had collected on the side of his neck, and had not yet been sponged away. A moment later he had made an impression of the thumb upon the slip of paper.

The surgeon, busy examining the wound in his scalp, looked down with a smile of astonishment.

"What 's that for?" he asked.

Hoffman folded up the paper, after writing something upon it with his pencil.

"While I am having my wound sewed up,"

he said, "I want this message taken to the address written upon it."

The surgeon took the paper and looked at it.

"Some friend of yours?" he asked, suspiciously.

"Never mind about that. All I ask is, that while I am waiting here, this message be delivered. It is vitally important. I can say no more."

The surgeon glanced at the constable, who stood close by.

"Any objection to this being sent?" he asked.

"Not as I know of," the other replied, "seein' as it contains nothin' but a bloomin' thumb print and a number."

Hoffman handed him a sovereign.

"This is for the messenger," he said. "I shan't want any change."

The constable grinned, and went toward the door.

"I 'll attend to the matter, sir," he said.

"And please ask the messenger to hurry," Hoffman called after him. "I want to get an answer, here, before I leave."

"I fancy you 'll do that all right, my friend," the surgeon laughed, dipping his sponge in the antiseptic solution. "I 've got a dozen stitches to put in your scalp before I 'm through with

you. You ve got a nasty wound. It will take me the better part of an hour."

When the cut had been finally dressed and bandaged, Hoffman was given a stimulant, and allowed to lie back in his chair and rest for a time. He felt dizzy, weak, owing to the pain and loss of blood. Presently the constable came to him, his face very grave.

"If you are ready, sir, we 'll be getting on," he said.

"Has n't there been any answer to my message?" Hoffman asked.

"Yes, sir. The answer is that I am to take you to the party to whom it was addressed."

"How did the message come?"

"By a youngish gentleman, sir. He 's waiting outside, in a motor car."

Hoffman breathed easier.

"Very well," he said. "I 'm ready."

The man in the car was quite unknown to Hoffman. He looked at the latter curiously, but made no comment.

"Get in, constable," he said, when Hoffman had taken his seat. A moment later they had driven off.

At the expiration of some twenty minutes, as nearly as Hoffman could judge, the vehicle stopped in a dark street. Hoffman's companion got out, and bade him do likewise. The

constable followed, and they presently entered a doorway, and found themselves in a large, dimly lighted hall.

At a door some distance down, on one side, the young man halted, and knocked. A gruff voice bade them enter. Hoffman's companion opened the door and, standing aside, allowed him to pass into the room.

At a large desk a heavily built man sat, writing. He glanced up with a frown.

"You will wait outside, Northrup," he said. "I wish to see this gentleman alone."

"And the constable?"

"I shall not require him further."

The man addressed as Northrup stood for a moment in surprise, then left the room, closing the door carefully after him.

Hoffman took a step forward, regarding the other occupant of the room with eager interest. It was the same mysterious person from whom he had received his original instructions, prior to his first visit to Antwerp.

"Take a seat," the man at the desk said, fixing his piercing grey eyes on Hoffman's face.

The latter sat down, and waited for the other to continue.

"It seems," the man with the grey eyes went on, "that my plans are being constantly upset. What is the trouble now? Must you always

jeopardize our efforts, by getting into altercations with the police?"

"I am sorry, sir," replied Hoffman, flushing, "but the fault is not mine."

"How so? Explain yourself. I know nothing, having only just received your message." He glanced at the slip of paper which lay on the desk before him. On it was the bloody print of Hoffman's thumb, with the number 424 inscribed below.

"The case is very simple, sir. Tonight I managed to secure, at Lord Brooke's house, some information of the utmost value to our friends across the water. Acting in accordance with instructions received in Antwerp, I arranged to convey this information to a certain woman, of whom you already know. I went, secretly and alone, to meet her. Scarcely had I given her the message, when the police broke in. Only by resisting the constable was I able to insure the woman's escape."

"She got away then—and with the message?"

"Yes." Hoffman nodded.

"But—if you told no one where you were going, how did the police know of your whereabouts?"

"I cannot tell you, since I myself only secured the woman's address a few moments be-

fore I met her. But the constable who broke into the house was accompanied by Miss Patricia Brooke, Lord Brooke's sister. I can only conclude that she must have followed me."

"And why?"

"I cannot say, unless she saw me take a certain paper from Lord Brooke's desk."

The man with the grey eyes seemed to ponder. Presently he spoke.

"The woman, your assistant, got away safely, you say?"

"Yes. But whether she will be able to reach Antwerp or not I, of course, do not know."

"Why did you not go yourself? The matter is sufficiently important."

"I intend to go, as soon as I am at liberty. My superior in Antwerp insisted that the message should be conveyed to him in duplicate by both the woman and myself."

"Oh! I see. That is better. He was expecting this message, then?"

"Certainly. Upon its receipt, the German squadron under Admiral von Spee will at once attack the British at Port William."

"Good! Good!" The man at the desk appeared to be very much pleased. "Nothing has gone wrong then, I see."

"Nothing, except that I have a broken head, and Miss Brooke, I fear, a broken heart. You

can imagine how bitter a blow it must have been to her, to realize that one who has been trusted as I have been could be guilty of such treachery."

"It cannot be helped," the older man remarked, with a shrug of his shoulders. "The cause for which you have worked, and your conscience, must be your justification. When do you leave for Antwerp?"

"By the first boat from Harwich in the morning."

"Good. Your frequent passages, recently, have attracted attention. Be on your guard."

"I shall, sir."

"How about your return?"

Hoffman smiled grimly.

"That is another matter," he said.

The older man looked suddenly grave.

"Is it absolutely necessary for you to go?" he asked.

"Absolutely. To obtain my reward, if for no other reason. I have been promised a hundred thousand marks."

"And you feel that you should collect them?"

"I feel that, should I fail to do so, all my work will have been for nothing."

The man at the desk smiled comprehendingly.

"Yes—you are right," he said. "It is

vitally necessary that you should go." He rose, and extended his hand. "You have done splendidly, Mr. Hoffman. Keep up your courage, and do the best you can. And rest assured, your devotion will not be forgotten. God be with you."

"Thank you, sir," returned Hoffman, gravely. "With your permission, I will spend the remainder of the night here. It would be unwise for me to return to my rooms."

"You are right. I will have Mr. Northrup give you a shake-down."

"And my satchel. I was obliged to leave it in the hands of the police."

"It will be returned to you, before you leave in the morning." He rang a bell, and the man who had brought Hoffman to the room entered. "Mr Northrup, see that Mr. Hoffman has accommodations for the night. Also secure from the police his satchel, and return it to him. He will take the boat train for Harwich in the morning."

Hoffman followed Mr. Northrup to a small bedroom containing a military cot, upon which he passed a most uncomfortable night. The task which lay before him, the throbbing wound in his head, the grief-stricken face of Patricia Brooke, rising constantly before his mind's eye, all served to keep him awake. It was with

a sense of relief that he partook of a hasty breakfast, and, satchel in hand, accompanied Mr. Northrup to the train.

His journey to Rotterdam was entirely uneventful. On his arrival, he determined to go to the German consul, as before, and secure a safe conduct to Antwerp. The round brass disc furnished him by Herr Schwartz reposed safely in his pocket-book, but he felt that the time to use it had not yet arrived.

On reaching Antwerp, he went at once to the office of the Military Governor, as before. Becker, the latter's secretary, received him with an imperturbable courtesy, but, instead of conducting him to Herr Schwartz, ushered him into a small room adjoining the Governor's suite.

"You will wait here," he said, "until Herr Schwartz sends for you. He is occupied, at present, but will see you as soon as he is able. There are some books and papers on the table, to help you pass the time. But do not attempt to leave the room. It is forbidden." He smiled coldly, and went away.

This singular and unexpected turn of affairs filled Hoffman with vague uneasiness. Why had Herr Schwartz not sent for him at once? Certainly the information he brought was of sufficient importance, although, he remembered,

Mademoiselle Liebmann had doubtless arrived before him. Possibly the secret agent had left Antwerp for a conference with military or naval authorities, in the matter of the proposed attack on the British fleet. Speculation, however, was useless. There was nothing to do but wait until he was sent for. With a feeling of dissatisfaction he turned to the books upon the table, and tried to read.

Some time later, an attendant brought him a light supper on a tray. There was still no news from Herr Schwartz, and as the hours passed, and none came, Hoffman began to feel distinctly alarmed. Had anything gone wrong? Was he to remain where he was the rest of the night? His watch showed him that it was close to eleven o'clock.

At last, when he had almost given up hope, and was considering the advisability of attempting a nap on the floor, the door was suddenly opened, and Hoffman saw that Herr Schwartz's secretary, the young man he had heard addressed as "Carl," stood on the threshold.

"Herr Schwartz will see you now," he said. "You will please follow me."

Hoffman rose at once, and went to the door.

"I was afraid I might have to spend the night here," he said, with an attempt at jocularity.

The secretary, however paid no attention to his remark, but led the way along a silent corridor, from which they presently passed to the courtyard of the huge building.

The place was silent, dark. Crossing it at a rapid pace, they presently emerged into a narrow street. Some distance along it, Hoffman's companion paused at a small wooden door, which he proceeded to open with a passkey. There was no one in the gloomy hallway, but a gas light at its further end illuminated faintly a second door, at which the guide knocked. It was of heavy iron or steel.

"Come in," said a muffled voice in German.

There was a sound as of the sliding of bolts, and the door swung open. Hoffman entered. He was in the same room as that in which he had last seen Herr Schwartz, although on that occasion he had entered it by another route.

The room was brilliantly lighted. Herr Schwartz sat at his desk, his back to the wall, his lips twisted in a sardonic smile.

CHAPTER XX

PATRICIA BROOKE drove home in her car, after Hoffman's arrest, scarcely knowing where she was going, or how. Every preconceived idea in her mind concerning Hoffman had been shattered, destroyed. The man she had come to love had turned out to be a contemptible scoundrel, guilty of the vilest treachery. The facts pounded in her brain, in opposition to the love she had felt, the love that had told her that this man was fine and strong and honorable, incapable of the very things she had seen with her own eyes. And what had she seen? She reviewed, mentally, the picture revealed beneath the slightly raised window-shade. Hoffman in friendly conversation with the discredited seamstress. Hoffman giving the woman a paper, which, even at that distance, she was able to recognize as the one he had stolen from Alan's desk. And, crowning infamy of all, the woman's impulsive kiss. He had proven false to friendship, to hospitality, to love. And, in the end, he had

risked his life to save this creature, to enable her to make good her escape. The thoughts that raced through the girl's brain were intolerable, searing, scarcely to be borne. She staggered at last into the house, groping, mentally, for some firm ground upon which to set her feet, some sane refuge for her reeling brain.

The library was deserted. Patrick, with alarm in his eyes, told her that Lord Brooke had not yet returned. Lady Brooke, he said, had retired to her room. Patricia did not go up to her; she was Bob's sister, and like him, of an alien race. She threw herself into a chair, and sat in silent misery to await her brother's return.

It was long past midnight when Lord Brooke arrived. He seemed tired, anxious, disturbed in mind. He would have gone upstairs at once, had not Patricia called to him. With a startled expression he entered the library.

"Why—Pat—what is the matter?" he asked, seeing the horror in the girl's eyes.

"Sit down, Alan," she said in a dull voice, "I want to talk to you."

He began to protest, but she silenced him with a gesture.

"There is something that I must tell you," she said.

"Very well. But I think you had better turn in and rest. You look wretchedly."

The girl paid no attention to this.

"Alan," she said, "Bob—Mr. Hoffman—stole a paper from the desk in your study this evening."

"How do you know?" he asked, showing no great surprise at her accusation.

"I saw him. After that, I followed him to his rooms. I wanted an explanation. I did not see him there. He was just coming out, so I followed him again. He went to meet that woman who was here—that seamstress. He gave her the paper. I saw him. Then I called in the police, but Mr. Hoffman resisted them and the woman escaped. He is a scoundrel. I thought you ought to know."

The expression which swept over Lord Brooke's face showed clearly enough the agitation he felt, but it seemed to Patricia that it was not exactly of the sort she had expected.

"You say Hoffman was arrested?" he cried. "Good God!" He sprang to the telephone.

"I do not think you can get him out this time," Patricia said wearily. "He assaulted the officer, and allowed the woman, who is certainly a spy, to escape."

Lord Brooke paid no attention to her. He

was speaking in a tense voice over the wire. In a few moments she heard him utter an exclamation of relief.

"Thank God!" he said, and returned to the library, his face flushed, but no longer showing signs of his previous agitation.

"Patricia," he suddenly blurted out, with brotherly frankness, "you would have done better had you minded your own affairs."

This was too much. Patricia rose from her chair in horror.

"Do *you* defend him?" she cried.

"Sit down, my child. You simply do not understand, that is all."

"Understand what? That Mr. Hoffman is a thief and a scoundrel?"

"He is nothing of the sort. As I say, you simply do not understand what has taken place."

"Then be good enough to explain it to me."

Lord Brooke drew himself wearily into a chair.

"I will," he said. "Bob Hoffman has done everything for which you blame him with my knowledge and consent."

If a bombshell had suddenly exploded under Patricia Brooke's feet, she could not have been more astonished than she was by her brother's words. That the latter had not only been

cognizant of Hoffman's actions, but had aided and abetted them, left her speechless with amazement.

"You—you mean—" she stammered, "that—that you knew it?"

"Certainly."

"Knew that he stole the paper from your desk?"

"I hoped he would, since I put it there for that purpose."

Patricia sank back into her chair. The thing was too much for her. Yet she could not fail to perceive that her brother was not only in full possession of his faculties, but entirely in earnest.

"Tell me about it," she said, simply.

"Very well. But in the strictest confidence. Bob Hoffman has acted like a hero, and your unexpected interference almost upset everything he has done. The situation is this. When Admiral Cradock's squadron was destroyed, off the coast of Chile, some weeks ago, the Admiralty Naval Staff, assisted by one of the cleverest men at Scotland Yard, conceived the idea of decoying the Germans into a battle, by furnishing them with false information. It was necessary to find someone, with irreproachable papers and credentials, who was at the same time in a position to secure informa-

tion concerning our naval affairs. To secure such a man presented almost insurmountable difficulties. It would have been a waste of time to have sent a man who had no actual sources of information, or whose credentials would not bear the closest scrutiny, for we know that the enemy's secret service, perhaps the best in the world, would at once discover the least flaw in our plans. At the same time, we desired if possible to obtain someone not an Englishman, since the man in question would have to play the part of a traitor, and for an outsider, a citizen of another country, to do this, would be more readily believable, than for one of our own people. Then, too, the man must have a reason for his actions, in other words, must be somewhat in need of money—not poor exactly, but the sort of man to whom a substantial reward for services rendered would be entirely acceptable.

"The only person we could hit upon who in any degree fulfilled these various requirements was Bob. When he was selected for the work, I did not know, of course, that he would undertake it, but I told the gentleman from Scotland Yard, who handled the entire matter for us, that the best inducement to cause him to do so was a promise that he should be sent to the front, later on. For the rest, he was told noth-

ing, except that he was serving the Allied cause, and that absolute obedience would be required of him. He does not know, even now, that I am concerned in the matter at all. He was merely told to convey every bit of information I might give him to the enemy. Naturally he must have suspected that there was a purpose in all this, but I doubt if he understands just what the purpose was. He went to Antwerp and gave the enemy's secret service bureau information regarding the departure of our fleet under Admiral Sturdee. They locked him up for six days, to see if what he told them was true. If it had not been, he would have been shot."

"Oh—Alan! You had no right."

"Just a moment," Lord Brooke interrupted. "The fleet *did* sail, as he said it would, and from then on, their confidence in him began to grow. Naturally, he was tested, over and over. That Mercier woman was a German spy. She came over to see that everything was all right, and Hoffman himself assisted her to land, by orders he gave to another of our men. Of course the woman did not know this, for the least suspicion on her part would undoubtedly have cost Bob his life.

"We helped along the confidence the German secret service people felt in him, by furnishing

him with correct information regarding the sailing of a transport, not a loaded one, as it happens—we were not willing to take *that* chance. The transport was sunk. You interfered, on that occasion, and Bob was obliged to act with decision, in order to get the woman free, with the message.

"Then we were ready for our final effort. The paper that Hoffman stole from my desk, the contents of which I had already told to him, was a false despatch from Admiral Sturdee, who is at the Falkland Islands. It stated that our ships were without coal, and therefore helpless. That is the message that Bob gave to that woman tonight. I thank God that nothing interfered, to prevent her from getting away with it."

Patricia's eyes were wide with amazement. Her expression indicated the utmost chagrin.

"And to think I almost spoiled everything," she exclaimed. "What a fool he must have thought me."

"It seems you did manage to get him a broken head, but, after all, your interference had its favorable side."

"How so?"

"It will, I hope, serve to increase the confidence with which Bob is regarded by our friends, the enemy."

"But—I don't understand. What difference does it make—now."

"All the difference in the world. He will leave for Antwerp in the morning."

"Leave for Antwerp!" The girl shuddered. "What for?"

"Don't you see? He has pretended to do all this for the sake of a large reward—a hundred thousand marks. If he did not appear to claim the money, suspicion would be at once cast upon the whole affair."

"But—how can he go? He is under arrest."

"I have just been talking with our man at Scotland Yard. He will be released at once. It is extremely fortunate that the injury he received was not more serious. As it is, the wound required several stitches."

"Poor Bob! Oh—I 'm sorry—terribly sorry! And it was all my fault. Why did you keep all this from me. Why was I left in the dark?"

"Because the slightest suggestion on your part, the least indiscretion, might have cost him his life. An idle word, overheard by those who were watching him, even a look, might have been fatal. Your perfectly natural action, tonight, may have done more for Bob's safety than anything that has occurred. We were so extremely careful, in laying our plans, that we even did not let him know of *my* complicity in

the matter. He was obliged to actually steal the information from me, just as would have been the case had he really been an agent of the enemy. The whole matter has been handled with the utmost skill and care. I only hope that the results will be what we expect."

"And what *do* you expect? You say Bob took to Antwerp a false message, saying that our ships were helpless—without coal. What then?"

"We hope the enemy will decide to attack. If they do, they will find out that Admiral Sturdee is not so helpless as they think!"

"And you say that Bob has gone to Antwerp, to claim the reward promised him?"

"Yes. It was unavoidable."

"But—then"—the girl's cheeks grew ashen with fear—"then, when the deception is discovered he—they will shoot him!" she exclaimed.

"I hope not." Lord Brooke's face was very grave. "He will reach Antwerp tomorrow afternoon. I do not see how the woman, his accomplice, can arrive there much before him. The information they bring must first be sent to headquarters, for action. If an attack is decided upon, word must be cabled to von Spee, who is doubtless in touch, through his wireless, with some point off the South American coast.

All this will consume hours, days, even. Then the German squadron must sail from where it is to the Falkland Islands. Naturally I do not know its location, but I should suppose it to be at least a day or two's journey away. I do not think it at all probable that our friends in Antwerp will keep Bob there all that time. In fact, it seems to me far more probable that they will send him back here, in order that he may secure any further information that may be available, bearing on the movements of Sturdee's fleet."

The girl was silent. It was clear that she was by no means reassured.

"I hope you are right, Alan," she said. "I love Bob Hoffman. If anything were to happen to him, I should never forgive myself —or you."

It was Lord Brooke's turn to be surprised.

"Patricia," he said, "you really mean that you care for him."

"I do. And I am sorry you ever got him into this. A fair fight is one thing. But this sort of double-dealing is not fair—"

"The other side do it—ten to our one."

"I know it. So much the worse for them. I only hope that Bob gets back safely."

"I feel sure he will, Pat. Don't worry." Lord Brooke put his arm about her. "They

trust him now. And the cablegram was written on Admiralty paper. I can't believe for a moment that they will suspect anything. Even your interference—the broken head, all helped. I expect to see Bob back in London the day after tomorrow, without fail."

"I pray to God you may be right," said Patricia, solemnly, as she went toward the door.

"Amen!" her brother responded.

CHAPTER XXI

"COME in, my friend!" exclaimed Herr Schwartz, as Hoffman paused in the doorway. "I have been waiting for you."

"On the contrary," the young American retorted, with some heat, "it is I who have been waiting for you."

"Pardon me. I had quite forgotten. When did you arrive?"

"Late this afternoon."

"I hardly expected you so soon. Indeed, I am not sure that I expected you at all. I understood that you were wounded, and had, in all probability, been placed under arrest."

"You were correct in both instances," Hoffman replied, pointing to his bandaged head. "The wound I still have. The matter of my arrest was more easily disposed of."

"How so? Are the English police so accommodating?" The little man's eyes gleamed with suspicion.

"Not at all. I should be in London yet, but

for a most fortunate chance that enabled me to effect my escape."

"So? What was it?"

Hoffman sank into a chair. His throbbing head had become excessively painful.

"I will tell you. After the policeman had struck me down, as Mademoiselle Liebmann has no doubt related to you, he left me lying, as he supposed, insensible, and ran out in pursuit of my companion."

"Yes." Herr Schwartz nodded. "So I have been told."

"As it happened I was not insensible. I at once got up. No one was with me, with the exception of Lord Brooke's sister. I appealed to her at once to permit me to escape."

"And she did so? It seems incredible,"

"Not at all. There was a most excellent reason. Not only would my arrest have brought disgrace upon the entire family, but Miss Brooke has done me the honor to fall in love with me."

"So? Go on."

"That is all. The policeman had gone. I was alone with Miss Brooke. I told her that, unless I escaped at once, I should in all probability lose my life. I pointed out to her that she could readily tell the policeman when he returned, that I had dashed out without her

being able to stop me. That, of course, would relieve her of any blame. I promised her that I would leave England at once, and never trouble her again. Her affection for me caused her to do as I asked."

"Did she not, then, know of the theft of the paper from her brother's desk."

"I do not think so."

"Then why did she follow you?"

"I can only attribute her action to jealousy. She probably suspected that I was going to meet Mademoiselle Liebmann, with whom, on a former occasion, she had the misfortune to find me at my rooms."

"So the young woman permitted you to escape."

"Yes. The policeman who struck me did not, of course, know who I was. Miss Brooke promised, as I left her, not to give him my name. Thus I was not connected with the matter at all."

"I see. What did you do then?"

"I returned to my rooms, after first stopping at a physician's nearby, to have my head bandaged. This morning I took the boat from Harwich, and, by good luck, was not stopped. I presume the description that the policeman was able to give was too vague to make it possible to identify me. He saw me

for only a moment, as I grappled with him in the dark hallway."

"Do you think, then, that Lord Brooke has discovered the loss of the paper Miss Liebmann brought?"

"No. I hardly think so. Last night he expected to work late at the Admiralty. Unless he happened to look for it this morning, before going to his office, he probably did not discover that it was gone."

Herr Schwartz seemed somewhat relieved.

"Repeat the message to me, please, in order to confirm the document already given me."

Hoffman proceeded to repeat, word for word, the contents of the cablegram from Admiral Sturdee.

His companion nodded.

"I presume, then," he said, "that you are ready to claim the reward of one hundred thousand marks that I promised you."

"That was naturally my purpose in coming to Antwerp."

"Do not be in a hurry, young man," Herr Schwartz observed, with a dry laugh.

"I am not in a hurry. I merely ask you to carry out your part of the bargain, as I have carried out mine."

"All in good time. First we must be sure that you have carried out your part."

"Have I not brought you the news for which you asked?"

"Yes. I do not dispute it. And neither will I conceal from you the fact that I have just returned from a conference with our naval chiefs, and, as a result of that conference, orders were sent at least six hours ago, to Admiral von Spee, at a certain point off the South American coast. Those orders were to sail north, proceed to the Falkland Islands, reconnoitre, and, if your information proves correct, attack and destroy the British fleet. If there have been no delays, the German squadron, allowing for differences in time, will reach Port William at daylight."

"I see. Then what is your objection to paying me my money and letting me go?"

"This. In work such as that in which I am engaged, nothing is certain. In spite of the various tests to which you have been subjected, in spite of your actions at critical, even dangerous moments, there always remains the possibility that your information may prove incorrect."

"Should it prove so," Hoffman asserted indignantly, "the fault would certainly not be mine. The message I brought you, stolen from Lord Brooke's desk, is official. There can be no mistake about it."

"So far as you are concerned, I am inclined to believe that is true. But it is within the range of possibility that you yourself, while entirely honest in your efforts, may have been deceived. Suppose, for instance, that Lord Brooke, knowing you to be a spy, has furnished you with false information?" The secret agent bent his keen little eyes with piercing force upon Hoffman's face.

The latter realized at once the man's purpose. Without entertaining any real doubts as to the genuineness of the information that had been brought him, he was still trying, by every means in his power, to break down the young American's guard, upon the faint chance that there might be some mistake. Hoffman faced him, clear-eyed, unmoved.

"Had Lord Brooke suspected me, my friend," he remarked, "he would never in the world have allowed me to risk my life, as I am risking it now. He would have his wife to consider, if he did not consider me. Do not forget that Lady Brooke is my sister."

Herr Schwartz seemed to be somewhat reassured.

"You realize, then," he said, "that you have risked your life in coming here?"

"Perfectly."

"In that case, I need hardly explain to you

why I am not yet ready to pay you the hundred thousand marks."

"What do you mean?"

"This. Here is the money." He drew a huge roll of German banknotes from one of the drawers of the desk, and laid it before him. "It is yours—when I receive word that the British fleet has been attacked, helpless, without coal, at Port William. But should I, on the contrary, receive a different report, should it turn out, to be perfectly frank, that the information you have given me was false, you will not receive the hundred thousand marks. Instead, you will be taken to the courtyard of the Hôtel de Ville, and shot without even the formality of a trial." He paused, as though to allow this bit of information to sink into Hoffman's mind. The latter faced him, as imperturbable as ever. He shrugged his shoulders as he replied.

"I have done my best. If I have been mistaken, it is the fortune of war."

"There is one way, however, in which your life may be saved, in case you feel it to be in any danger," Herr Schwartz went on, in a voice smooth as silk. "If you *know* that the news you have brought me is false, if you *know* that on the strength of it our squadron has been sent to destruction, nothing on earth can

save your life, except a full confession now."

"What good would that do you?" Hoffman blurted out.

"It would save our fleet, since, up to midnight, there would still be time and opportunity to reach our commander and countermand his orders. I am putting you through this test for a definite reason. It is to make certain, beyond all question, that you have told me the truth." He glanced at a clock which hung on the wall behind him. "It is now fifteen minutes to twelve. You have a quarter of an hour, in which to make up your mind—to confess, if it should be that you have anything to confess. By doing so in time to save our fleet, you will also save your life, for, in return for that confession, I will allow you to leave this room, to leave Belgium, a free man. The alternative of course, is that you will be shot. If, on the contrary, you have nothing to confess, if the news you have brought me is authentic, you have no reason to feel at all alarmed, for the moment I receive news from Berlin that proves its correctness—and that news will, of course, be a great naval victory—I will hand you the hundred thousand marks and offer you my sincere congratulations."

Hoffman drew a cigar from his pocket and lit it.

"Are you going to stay here all night?" he asked.

"Yes. And so are you. I could not sleep, with such tremendous interests in the balance. I shall wait here until I receive word from Berlin, and you will wait with me. The matters between us must be settled, one way or the other, before we part." He leaned back in his chair and gazed anxiously at the clock. "Eight minutes to twelve. In eight minutes I must call up *Wilhelmstrasse* and make my report. The test to which you have just been subjected was suggested by our chief. He felt, as I did, that you should fully understand the penalties which attach to failure, in our work. There remain still five minutes. Have you anything to say?"

Hoffman puffed at his cigar, blew the smoke carelessly toward the ceiling, then shook his head.

"Nothing," he said.

"Good. In that event, I am convinced that you have told us the truth." He turned to the telephone, which rested on a bracket at his right, and gave, in German, some instructions concerning the call he was about to make.

"You are a brave man, Herr Schwartz." Hoffman said, with a smile.

"Why so?" The secret agent seemed surprised.

"Why not? Suppose, for instance, I had been deceiving you. What is to prevent me from knocking out your brains with this chair, taking the hundred thousand marks, and making my way to Rotterdam?"

The secret agent laughed. It was the first time that Hoffman had seen him do so, at least with any semblance of humor.

"My dear young man," he said. "Do you think me a child? Were you to rise from your seat, to make one single threatening motion toward me, I should, in the first place, kill you instantly with the automatic pistol which is here close at hand." He indicated the black stock of the weapon, protruding from beneath some papers. "At the same moment, in case I should by any chance miss you, although it is unlikely, since I am an excellent shot, I should with my left hand strike this bell." He pointed to a tiny silver gong at the other side of his desk. "It would at once summon my secretary, who, heavily armed, is on guard in the hall. And if, by some superhuman power you were able to overcome both my secretary and myself, and open the doors of this room, which are fastened by electrically controlled bolts, I assure you that you would never be

able to pass beyond the limits of Antwerp, much less cross the frontier into Holland." He turned to the telephone, as the bell rang, and after listening intently for a few moments, spoke three code words, which to Hoffman meant nothing. Then he turned once more to the latter. "So you see, Mr. Hoffman, the chances of escape are not very good. But I hope you have no such plans. I trust you, believe in you and your sincerity, and, as a proof of what I say, I have just sent final word to my superior in Berlin that he may depend on your information as authentic. The time for countermanding Admiral von Spee's orders is past. Whatever the result, there will be a naval engagement off the Falkland Islands at dawn." He spoke with solemn earnestness. Hoffman, quite unconcerned, yawned, and threw away the stump of his cigar.

"I 'd like to have a drink of water," he said.

Herr Schwartz pointed to a closet at the other end of the room.

"You will find some bottled water in there," he said. "Also some beer, in case you prefer it."

Hoffman went to the closet, and helped himself to a bottle of mineral water. Then he threw himself wearily into his chair.

"I 'm tired out," he said. "I could n't

sleep last night, and this cut in my head has made me as weak as a cat. If you don't mind, I 'll take a little nap."

"Help yourself," the secret agent said, looking up from a mass of papers. "I 'm sorry I can't offer you a couch, but as it is, you will be obliged to make yourself as comfortable as you can in your chair."

"Oh—this is all right. I could sleep on a pine board, tonight." He yawned, closed his eyes, leaned back his head, and seemed presently to doze off.

The clock upon the wall ticked its interminable course from midnight to one o'clock, from one o'clock to two. Hoffman, huddled back in the chair like a man thoroughly exhausted, snored with rhythmical precision.

At last Herr Schwartz put down his papers. He seemed nervous, worn. Suddenly he struck sharply upon the bell beside him, and at the same time pressed a connection beneath his desk with one foot. The bolts of the door through which Hoffman had entered the room slid back with a grating sound, and the young secretary put in his head. Hoffman turned uneasily, but still continued to snore.

"Carl," the secret agent said. "Go to the kitchen and bring me some bread and cheese.

There is also a cold fowl. We will take a little supper."

The secretary closed the door, and disappeared. Herr Schwartz rose cautiously from his seat, took the automatic pistol from the desk and slipped it into his pocket. Then, with a long stare at the sleeping man in the chair, he went to the closet at the other end of the room, and took from it two bottles of beer, and two glasses. Holding these in his hands, he started cautiously back to the desk.

His eyes never left Hoffman's face, and as he passed the sleeping man, he turned, watching him with the utmost vigilance. It seemed as though he feared the young American might suddenly rise and attack him. So intent was his gaze upon the latter's face, that he failed to see a spasmodic movement which suddenly convulsed the young man's right leg. Quite unexpectedly it shot out across the secret agent's path, and before the latter could turn his head to see what had impeded his progress, he tripped and fell, crashing to the floor amidst a shower of beer and broken glass.

With lightning-like speed Hoffman sprang upon him, twisting his arms behind his back with one hand, while with the other he possessed himself of the automatic pistol. The

cries of the fallen man died out in a series of dismal squeaks, as Hoffman threw his hundred and eighty pounds upon his back, pressing him to the floor with both knees. Then, while the little man struggled with the utmost violence, the American with one hand ripped the leather belt from about his waist, and with it securely pinioned the fallen man's arms behind his back. Then taking him by the throat, to smother any further attempts to call for help, he stuffed a handkerchief in a wad between his teeth. The whole operation had taken less than thirty seconds.

The secret agent, however, was still kicking violently about with his feet. Hoffman snatched from the pocket of his overcoat his long silk muffler and knotted it securely about Herr Schwartz's ankles. Then he lifted him up in his arms, and placed him in a chair at the further end of the room, out of sight of the door.

An examination of the mechanism that controlled the opening and closing of the two doors next occupied Hoffman's attention. On the floor, and directly beneath the desk, were two electric push buttons, set about eight inches apart. It was clear that, by pressing upon them with the foot, an electric connection was

made, by which the bolts of the two doors were drawn, allowing them to be opened. Hoffman made a hasty trial of the right hand door, and found that while, when the button was pressed, the door could readily be opened, the bolts flew back, by means of springs, as soon as the pressure on the button was released, and hence, when the door was closed, it automatically bolted itself, like any ordinary snap lock. He at once placed a heavy paper weight upon the button controlling the door by which the secretary had left. Then he stationed himself close beside the doorway, pistol in hand.

In a few moments he heard the young man coming along the hall. A little later a knock sounded on the door.

"Come in," Hoffman mumbled, in German. The door was at once pushed open, and the secretary entered, a plate of bread and cheese in one hand, a dish containing a roast chicken in the other. He did not perceive Hoffman, who stood in the shadow to the left of the doorway. Instead, his eyes sought the chair at the desk, in which he naturally expected to see the figure of his superior. When he did turn his gaze to the left, it was to look directly into the muzzle of the American's automatic pistol.

"Don't make any noise," Hoffman said, crisply, kicking the door to. "And put the food on the desk."

"But—Herr Schwartz!" the secretary exclaimed, in a tone of mingled amazement and alarm.

"Herr Schwartz is all right. Do what I tell you."

The young man carefully placed the two dishes upon the top of the desk. Hoffman's revolver was pressed closely against his back, discouraging any ideas of resistance. With his free hand the American took from his captive's pocket another automatic. Then he backed him across the room, and into the closet at its further side. It was a deep closet, built into the stone walls of the building, and in addition to the bottles of beer and mineral water on a shelf, it contained several overcoats, raincoats, umbrellas and hats.

"Go in face first," Hoffman commanded. "And don't make any noise, or call for help, or I will shoot you through the door." As he spoke, he closed the heavy oaken panel and locked it, drawing in front of it, as an additional precaution, a massive wooden filing case. Then he went to the push button beneath the secret agent's desk and removed from it the paper weight. At once the sliding of the bolts

told him that the door was securely locked.

The roast chicken, the bread and cheese, looked inviting. Hoffman proceeded to make a very agreeable meal. He seemed to be in no hurry to leave, and when he had finished, he pulled the chair in which the secret agent sat out into the middle of the room, and himself took Herr Schwartz's place behind the desk.

"My friend," he said, presently, lighting a cigar. "I am going to stay here and keep you company for quite a while, yet. It would be most unfortunate were the orders which have been given to your South Atlantic squadron to be in any way upset. Of course you have yourself told me that no messages could be gotten through, after midnight, but you might find a way. So I think I shall remain for an hour or two longer.

"In spite of the admirable precautions with which you have surrounded yourself, I have, as you see, so far overcome them. When I leave, I intend, after opening the bolts of the door, to cut the electric wires controlling them. Thus, when I close the door on leaving, the bolts will snap, and even should you or your secretary manage to free yourselves, you would be unable to open either door, until those connections had been re-established. In fact, since you will have no means for re-establish-

ing them, I really don't see how you are going to get out of here at all, until the doors themselves, which I observe to be of steel, are battered down. That is one of the grave defects of electrically controlled bolts. I figured all that out during the two hours in which you supposed me to be asleep.

"The final threat you made to me, concerning the matter of my escape, was that I could not pass the frontier, or even leave Antwerp, without being apprehended by your agents. Strangely enough, you seem to have forgotten that you yourself gave me a safe conduct through your lines." The young man drew from his pocket the round brass disc which Herr Schwartz had given him on the occasion of his previous visit. "I don't know how it will work, for I have n't tried it, but I accept your word that it will do as you say.

"As for this money," he tapped the bundle of banknotes on the desk. "I do not want it. Not but what I have earned it fairly enough, I will not deny that. But I did n't undertake the work I have done for money. That was only a blind. I had a much better reason, although I fancy it would not appeal to you.

"As for the information I have brought you, frankly I do not know whether it is correct or not. I have my doubts, of course, but I am

not certain. You see, I have been working very much in the dark. I have carried out instructions that often seemed to me unbelievably foolish and wrong. Perhaps the superior intelligence that was directing my movements did not wish me to know too much. I do not know. But this I will say to you; should I read in the papers tomorrow that the British squadron under Admiral Sturdee has won a brilliant victory, I shall understand better than I do now the end to which I have been working for the past five weeks. I shall be sorry for the brave men who will lose their lives, of course, but that is the fortune of war. Such work as *you* do, my friend, such work as I have been doing all these weeks, is dirty, contemptible, underhanded, and I shall do no more of it. You have tried to gain an easy victory, to destroy the British fleet when it was helpless, and I have a strong suspicion that you have overreached yourself."

The little man in the chair was straining helplessly at his bonds, his eyes popping, his face flushed with rage. Hoffman regarded him with a cynical smile.

"I have no enmity for a man who fights fair," he said. "Your brave von Spee and his men sank Admiral Cradock's squadron in a stand-up fight, and nobody whined about it.

The British were out-gunned, and said so. Between brave men, honorable men, on either side, there can at least be mutual respect, mutual esteem. But you, my little friend, are a rat, and I am not in the least sorry that you have been caught in your own trap."

Hoffman rose, and put on his overcoat and hat. Then, after pressing the left hand button, and opening slightly the door by which he had entered he returned to the desk, pried both buttons from the floor with his knife, and poked the ragged ends of the wires down through the holes in the flooring, until they were no longer visible. He knew, now, that the electrical connections could not again be established, except by going to the basement below. Then with a smiling "good-night" he passed into the hall, and snapped the door to after him. The closing of the spring bolts told him that Herr Schwartz and his companion were prisoners beyond all possibility of escape.

CHAPTER XXII

FOR very nearly two days Patricia Brooke walked through life almost without being conscious of it. Through two sleepless nights, and the better part of two horrible days, she strove to persuade herself that Bob Hoffman was in no danger, that he would return, safe and sound, from his perilous journey. That he had left England she knew; her brother, from mysterious sources of his own, had been able to assure her of that.

One thing distressed her greatly, and she felt herself responsible for it. How would Hoffman be able to explain his escape from the police when he reached Antwerp? She tried in vain to concoct some plausible explanation, but failed. Yet would not his prompt gaining of his freedom be regarded as highly suspicious. If she had only taken Lady Brooke's advice, and not followed him that night! In her mental distress, she came to accuse herself, to consider herself wholly responsible, in case

anything should happen to him. And meanwhile, the hours passed on wings of lead.

On the afternoon of the second day her nervousness became almost unbearable. She walked up and down the floor of the library, starting at every sound, hoping that it might herald the young American's arrival. When at last she did hear someone at the front door, she feared to go out into the hall, lest it might be news of the sort she most dreaded.

A moment later Lord Brooke burst into the room. He was in a prodigious state of excitement.

"Patricia!" he cried, "we have just received word from Sturdee, at the Falkland Islands. He has met the enemy's vessels and destroyed them. Think of it."

The girl collapsed softly into a chair.

"Oh!" she gasped. "So soon."

"Why—yes. Isn't it splendid? And we have Bob Hoffman to thank for it."

"I hope you will be able to thank him," Patricia replied, in a low voice. "You said he would have two or three days in which to make his escape—in which to get away from Antwerp. Perhaps, as matters have turned out, he wasn't able to get away at all."

"By Jove! I hadn't thought of that. This splendid news quite took my breath away.

Still, my dear girl, I see no reason why he should not have left Antwerp this morning. He reached there yesterday."

"Did not this battle take place this morning?"

"Yes, at dawn. But that is several hours later, here. The news could not possibly have reached Antwerp before Bob left, provided, of course, he left early this morning." He glanced at his watch. "It 's time he was here now, if he got the morning boat from Rotterdam."

"And if he did n't?"

"Don't let us think of such things. I am convinced that Bob is safe."

"We must think of them. Don't you see that this wretched scheme into which you have led him may cost him his life? The Germans will rightly think that he deceived them. He will be executed, unless something is done. The United States Ambassador should be communicated with at once."

"Yes, you are right. That is, in case Bob does not arrive today. But there is still time. He may not have come via Rotterdam at all. Let us wait until morning at least."

Patricia was in despair. Now that the news of the British victory was known, nothing on earth, she felt, could save Hoffman, if he was

not already out of German territory. She sat quite still, while Lord Brooke explained what had happened to his wife, who had just come into the room.

"I told Patricia all about it, night before last," he concluded. "I felt that you both ought to know."

Lady Brooke felt some of the indignation that Patricia had already expressed.

"You ought not to have let him do it," she exclaimed. "It would have been different, had he been an Englishman. It would have been his duty, then. But as an American, he should have kept out of it."

"Do you feel the same way about all the other Americans who are risking their lives in France?" her husband asked quietly.

"That is different. They are doing honorable work. I quite agree with Patricia. This underhanded spying and treachery is n't good enough for Bob."

"You may be right, my dear," Lord Brooke returned, "but after all, Bob went into it with his eyes open. I made no attempt to persuade him. In fact, I had nothing to do with it at all."

"Then why did he do it?"

"I will tell you. His first reason was, that in return for what he has done, he is to be sent

to the front. He will have every facility for seeing all that 's going on, and writing about it to his heart's content. That was his first reason. His second, I honestly believe, was to 'make good' as he calls it, in the eyes of Patricia."

"Why—Alan! What had I to do with it?"

"Only this—that Bob is in love with you, and that he had a sort of an idea that you looked down on him, sitting idly about, here in London, while so many others, even of his own countrymen, were in France doing their bit—"

"Has everything in this wretched affair got to be my fault?" the girl asked, bursting into tears. "First he goes into this thing on my account, and then I make him risk his life by my ridiculous interference. Oh—if he only would come!"

As though in answer to her prayer, there came a sudden ringing at the door-bell. The three occupants of the room stood in silence, waiting for Patrick to announce the caller's name.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHEN Bob Hoffman made his escape from the study of Herr Schwartz, there was one circumstance that might lead to his capture, and he knew it. If either of the two men should, in any way be able to reach the telephone, and make use of it to call for help, the news of his escape would soon become known, and his capture would be inevitable. He took this chance with his eyes open, since he well knew that had he cut the telephone wires, as he had thought for a moment of doing, the breaking of the circuit would attract attention at the central exchange, and someone would at once be sent to the secret agent's office to find out the cause of the trouble. Therefore he decided to stake his chances of freedom against the strength of the oak door which imprisoned the secretary in the closet. Only by forcing this door, he very well knew, could the young man escape and reach the telephone.

The little hall in which he now found himself was closed at its further end by a wooden door.

This door was bolted on the inside. It was the work of only a moment to open it, and Hoffman stepped out into the deserted street.

The sky was clear, with brilliant stars, and a cold wind swept down from the north. His watch showed him that it was a quarter to four. There were three hours, at least, before daylight. Quite unfamiliar with the streets of the city, the young American on reaching an open square a short distance away, looked up, and locating without much difficulty the north star, set out in the direction thus indicated.

He knew, in a general way, that the city was under martial law. He also knew that regulations, in such cases, prohibited the inhabitants from being abroad in the streets at this hour of the morning. It was certain that the very first soldier or gendarme he met would instantly place him under arrest. This would not only be extremely awkward, but might result in his being lodged in jail until morning, by which time Herr Schwartz's plight would doubtless have been discovered by the other members of his staff, and the alarm given. Hoffman quickly made up his mind to accost the first soldier he might meet, and insist on his conducting him to his superior officer. He remembered the instructions that had accompanied the circular brass disc, that when shown

to a *commissioned officer only,* would it secure him safe conduct.

At the centre of the square that lay before him, Hoffman perceived a sort of sentry box, from which came a faint light. Going up to it, he saw a soldier, rifle in hand, nodding upon a tiny bench. He was a middle-aged man, a member, no doubt, of the *Landsturm,* and his fat red face was heavy with sleep. Hoffman touched him on the shoulder, and the man sprang to his feet with an exclamation of alarm. The smiling face of the young American reassured him.

"What do you want?" he asked gruffly, fingering his rifle.

"To see your commanding officer at once," Hoffman replied, in German.

"You will find him at the Hôtel de Ville." The man pointed to a towering building in the direction from which Hoffman had come. The latter cursed himself for not having thought of it before. Its rear faced the very street in which Herr Schwartz's office was located; the street, in fact, that he had just left. He started off, but the sentry stopped him.

"It is my duty to place you under arrest," he said. "Walk ahead. I will take you to headquarters."

In a few moments they reached the building to which Hoffman had several times come, in the past, to visit the offices of the Military Governor. It was to these same officers that his captor was now conducting him. A sleepy captain was in charge. When the soldier had stated the case, Hoffman turned to the officer, who was regarding him with suspicion.

"May I speak to you privately?" he said.

The officer withdrew for a few steps.

"What do you want?" he said.

"I desire an immediate passage across the frontier," he said.

"Across the frontier? What for? It is not permitted. Who are you?" His questions rattled about Hoffman's ears like the firing of a machine-gun.

The latter took from his pocket the passport, given him the day before by the Consul at Rotterdam.

"Here are my papers," he said.

The officer glanced at them without interest.

"They may be quite correct," he said, "but it makes no difference. No one can leave the city before daybreak."

"It is imperative that I should do so," Hoffman insisted. "In fact, I desire you to permit me to secure a conveyance, and to see

that I pass the frontier. I am the bearer of dispatches of the utmost importance. I must be in Rotterdam by dawn."

The officer's face grew grave. He looked at Hoffman as though unable to decide whether he was drunk or mad.

"What you ask is quite impossible," he said, coldly. "You must wait until morning, and see the Military Governor."

"I cannot wait." Hoffman drew from his pocket the round brass disc which the secret agent had given him, and placed it in the officer's hand. "I am acting for Herr Schwartz," he whispered.

The officer took the circular bit of brass, and his manner at once underwent a complete change. Turning his back toward the soldier, he took a jewelled pin from his cravat, and inserted it in a tiny depression that Hoffman, in spite of the most careful examination, had failed to discover. The disc flew open. In it was a circular bit of paper, containing a series of numbers. The Captain read them. He appeared to be making a mental calculation of some sort. Then he looked in a small notebook he took from his pocket.

"This identification number is correct," he said. "But I call your attention to the fact that the pass number expires at noon tomorrow,

and should have been renewed. When did you last see Herr Schwartz?"

"At midnight."

"At his office?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall go through the form of calling him up, in order to satisfy myself that there is no mistake."

"As you like," Hoffman replied, shrugging his shoulders, "but you will not find him. He has left the city."

The officer, in spite of Hoffman's words, attempted to reach the secret agent by telephone, but without result. The young man could picture to himself Herr Schwartz's fury at being unable to reply.

"You are delaying me in a most important matter," Hoffman observed coldly. "As I have told you before, I must start for Rotterdam immediately."

"How do you expect to reach there?" the officer asked. "There is no train until morning."

"If you will furnish me with the necessary authority, I can leave by fast automobile at once. The journey can be made in three hours. Send someone with me to see that I am not stopped at the frontier. If you cause me any delay the responsibility will be yours, and I

assure you it will not be a light one. My orders are to proceed to Rotterdam without the least delay."

Still the officer hesitated.

"I cannot understand why Herr Schwartz did not arrange for this matter himself," he said. "I shall telephone to the Military Governor."

This time the results, so far as Hoffman was concerned, were more favorable. The officer turned from the telephone instrument with a look of relief.

"The general knows you," he said, "and authorizes me to assist you by any means in my power." He turned to the soldier.

"Ask Lieutenant Giessner to step here," he said.

The man saluted, and went out into the corridor. Hoffman glanced at his watch. It was ten minutes past four.

A few minutes later, a tall, heavily built man with a blond head, came into the room and saluted.

"You sent for me, Captain," he said.

"Take this gentleman, by automobile, to the frontier at Esschen. Inquire there for orders. If you receive none to the contrary, you will allow him to pass into Holland."

The lieutenant turned to Hoffman with a stare of surprise.

"This way, if you please," he said, and saluting his superior officer, conducted the American down the corridor.

In the courtyard of the building a number of military automobiles were parked. Summoning one of these, the Lieutenant signed to Hoffman to get in. "Esschen," he said to the soldier at the wheel. A moment later they were off.

The distance was but fifteen miles. Once clear of the city streets, the automobile sped over the smooth level roads at a rapid rate. In half an hour, at the outside, Hoffman felt that he would be free. There was but one danger yet to be met—the possibility of orders of a contrary nature being received by his companion at the frontier. Just what the officer at the Hôtel de Ville had meant by his parting instructions Hoffman could not imagine. Had he been able to look back, and see the course that events were taking, he would have felt less certain of his escape.

The officer at the Hôtel de Ville, in spite of the assurances he had received from the Military Governor, in spite of the brass disc in Hoffman's possession, was still possessed by

a vague uncertainty. Why had not someone answered Herr Schwartz's telephone? It was quite true that the secret agent might be away, but it was equally true that there was generally someone at his house, his secretary, or in case of the latter's absence, his under-secretary, to receive and answer telephone calls. The more the officer thought of the matter, the more it troubled him. He decided to investigate in person.

From the Hôtel de Ville to Herr Schwartz's house was but a step. Throwing his cloak about him, the Captain gave some rapid instructions, and departed for the secret agent's house.

The small door in the side street, by which Hoffman had made his escape, stood unlocked, and ajar. This circumstance served still further to increase the officer's alarm. He entered the house, proceeded to the door of the study, and knocked.

At first there was no reply. He tried the knob, but found the door locked. Then he heard an inarticulate groan proceeding from within the room, followed by the sound of a heavy fall. Herr Schwartz, in his violent attempts to make himself heard, had been able to produce only a few feeble noises. Then, to

further attract attention, he had deliberately thrown himself from the chair to the floor.

The officer realized at once that something of an alarming nature had taken place. He tried in vain to force open the steel door, but his efforts were fruitless. He called loudly for help, but his calls remained unanswered. The house was deserted.

Rushing back to the Hôtel de Ville, he called some of his men together, and conducting them to the house, bade them batter in the door with the butts of their rifles. The attempt was without tangible result. They might as well have assaulted a piece of armor plate.

At this juncture the Captain, until now intent upon the immediate task before him, suddenly remembered Hoffman, and the circumstances surrounding his departure. Beyond question they were in the highest degree suspicious. He hurried back to his office, and seizing the telephone, called frantically for headquarters at Esschen. While waiting for the connection to be established, he glanced at his watch. The hands marked a quarter to five.

A sleepy voice presently answered him, inquiring what he wanted. His reply, staccato, made the telephone instrument rattle.

"This is Captain von Boehm, at Antwerp,"

he shouted. "Has Lieutenant Giessner reported there yet? He is arriving by automobile."

"No," the answer came. "Wait a minute. A car has just driven up."

"Instruct the Lieutenant not to permit the man with him to cross the frontier, but to return with him to Antwerp at once." With a growl of satisfaction he put down the receiver.

The journey of Hoffman and his companion had been a swift and uneventful one. When they drove up before the military headquarters at Esschen, the young American was already, in anticipation, safely on his way to Rotterdam and London. Yet, when he saw a dark figure in uniform standing in the lighted doorway of the building his heart gave a thump of dismay.

His companion turned to the driver, as the car came to a halt, and spoke a few rapid words in German.

"Wait here," he ordered. "If the man attempts to escape shoot him." In response, the driver fingered the automatic pistol at his belt.

There was not a moment to be lost. In ten steps, the Lieutenant would receive his instructions. Something, some intuitive fear, told Hoffman that they were not in his favor. Before him stretched the road into Holland. He could see the frontier posts, the barbed wire

fences at either side. A sentinel stood, silent, beside the road, his rifle ready for instant use. Hoffman's hand, resting in his overcoat pocket, grasped the muzzle of the automatic pistol he had taken from Herr Schwartz. The lieutenant had just reached the doorway.

Drawing his hand carelessly from his pocket, Hoffman swung the heavy weapon with all his strength against the side of the driver's head. The man, taken completely off his guard, wavered, then collapsed against the door of the car. In an instant Hoffman had swung himself over the back of the seat, and grasping the steering wheel, drove at full speed toward the frontier.

The sentry on guard stepped forward, rifle raised. As he fired, Hoffman turned the machine directly upon him. With a howl of dismay the fellow leaped back, fearing for his life. In his haste he stumbled and fell at the side of the road. The car, quickly righted, sped on its way.

A stream of pistol shots followed it, piercing the body, the hood, but, crouched behind the double row of seats, Hoffman remained unhurt. With one hand he unlatched the door beside him and tumbled the unconscious form of the driver into the road. The frontier posts loomed just ahead.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN Bob Hoffman walked into the drawing-room at Lady Brooke's he saw but one thing, and that was the flushed and tearful face of Patricia Brooke. This was the more true, since Patricia, after a gasping "Bob," flung herself at him and put her arms about his neck, to the utter scandalizing of Patrick, the butler, who at once withdrew below stairs to discuss the matter in private with the cook.

When the new arrival had been duly welcomed, and the excitement caused by his return had somewhat subsided, Lord Brooke went up to him and put out his hand.

"Congratulations, Bob," he said, simply. "Everything has worked out perfectly."

"What do you mean?" Hoffman asked, with a look of surprise.

"We have just received word at the Admiralty that Sturdee's squadron has won a brilliant victory."

Hoffman stared at his brother-in-law in amazement.

"Why do you congratulate me?" he asked.

"Because it was your courage and determination that made everything possible."

"Then—you—you know?"

"Certainly. I knew all the time."

"Patricia did n't," laughed Hoffman, looking sheepishly at the girl. "I was almost afraid to return here and face her. I 'm sure she must have thought me a scoundrel of the deepest dye."

"Whatever I may have thought, Bob," Patricia exclaimed, "I think now that you are a hero! Alan has told me everything."

"But—why did n't you let me know that you were in on this thing?" Hoffman said, turning to Lord Brooke.

"We thought it better not. You might have betrayed yourself in some way. It was better for you to act alone. And I must say, old chap, you did magnificently. May I ask how you managed to get away from Antwerp?"

"It 's a long story. They tried to stop me, of course, but I fooled them. Had quite a bit of trouble, at the frontier. Just managed to scrape across in time. The Dutch were very nice after I showed my papers." He proceeded to give the others a brief account of what had occurred.

Patricia looked at him with undisguised admiration.

"I think you are just about the bravest man I ever knew," she said.

"Nonsense. Everybody is brave in this war. There have been heroes by the thousand on both sides that nobody has ever heard of. I did my best, that was all." He turned to Lord Brooke. "I 'm glad that you are satisfied."

"Rather. And you may be sure, in return for what you have done, that the War Office will carry out its end of the bargain, and see that you are permitted to go to the front at once."

"Good!" Hoffman laughed. "I 've been trying hard enough to get there."

"More danger," Patricia observed, with a somewhat anxious smile.

"My dear girl," Lord Brooke observed, "Bob can sit in the front trenches, out there, and be in less danger than he will be right here in London."

"Why so?" asked the girl.

"Alan is quite right," interposed Hoffman. "My friend in Antwerp, Herr Schwartz, is likely to have a very bad quarter of an hour, on account of the way I managed to take him in. I don't imagine he is going to forget me, very soon, or what I did to him. I should n't

give two cents for my life, if I ever fell in with him or any of his people. The front is the safest place I know of, in my particular case, just now."

Lady Brooke went toward the door.

"I 'm going to order tea," she said. "Alan, come along. I have something I want to say to you." She gave her husband a significant look, which Hoffman intercepted.

"You are a brick, Nelly," he whispered, pressing his sister's hand.

"What confidences are you exchanging with Lady Brooke, Bob?" Patricia asked, as the young American turned to her.

Hoffman went up to the girl, and put his hands on her shoulders.

"Pat," he said in a voice that trembled just a little. "You remember what I said, before I went away. Well, it 's as true now as it was then. I love you, and, please God, I always shall love you. Will you marry me when I get back from the front?"

Patricia looked up into his face with glistening eyes.

"I will marry you whenever you want me to," she said. "If you had not come back from Antwerp, I—I think I should have died."

Patrick, passing the library door, turned away his head.

"Bless my soul!" he muttered to himself. "What is the h'aristocracy comin' to? A bloomin' h'American! Cook *will* be pleased!"

As for Patricia and Bob, they were too happy even to see him.

THE END

OCT 30 1930